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Rousseau's Pure State of Nature

VICTOR GOUREVITCH

Wesleyan University

Heinrich Meier's important new edition of the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*¹ invites us to rethink Rousseau's account of the state of nature, and more particularly of what he calls the "pure" state of nature.

Meier provides us with the most definitive text of the *Discourse* to date. He has collated the two 1755 editions and the posthumous 1782 Moulou and Du Peyrou edition which incorporated Rousseau's numerous corrections and additions; he has re-edited the *Letter* to "Philopolis," the pseudonym under which Charles Bonnet criticized the *Discourse*; the *Reply* to Le Roy, whom earlier editors had referred to as "An Unknown Naturalist" until Ralph Leigh identified him; the letter to Perdriau of 28 November 1754 about the Epistle Dedicatory; and all known fragments and drafts of the *Discourse*. The French texts are accompanied by Meier's facing German translations, and by extensive footnotes. They are preceded by a long Introductory Essay on "The Rhetoric and Intention" of the *Discourse*, and followed by a very complete and useful index in French to key terms and concepts.

It may at first appear surprising that the most authoritative edition of the *Second Discourse* should be the work of a scholar not writing in French. Yet one is almost immediately reminded of how indebted Rousseau studies are to the labors of "foreign" scholars for standard editions of the texts: C. E. Vaughan's two-volume *Political Writings* remained unrivaled for over half a century; G. R. Havens brought out the first critical edition of the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*; the only modern and complete edition of the polemical writings occasioned by the *First Discourse* is Ludwig Tente's three-volume *Die Polemik um den ersten Discours von Rousseau in Frankreich und Deutschland*; Ralph Leigh's splendid edition of the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* will surely remain definitive for a very long time to come. Meier's edition now claims a place in this short and distinguished list.

Starobinski's edition of the *Discourse* in the Pléiade *Œuvres complètes* had, since its appearance some twenty years ago, generally been regarded as the standard edition of the text. Meier has corrected errors and oversights in the Pléiade text; he has included additional drafts and fragments; and his notes

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit / Discours sur l'inégalité: Kritische Ausgabe des integralen Textes. Mit sämtlichen Fragmenten und ergänzenden Materialien nach den Originalausgaben und den Handschriften neu ediert, übersetzt und kommentiert*. By Heinrich Meier. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984, xcii + 532 pp.); hereafter referred to as Meier.

are informed by a keen sensitivity to the political character of Rousseau's argument. Not all of his corrections will significantly affect even a minute scholar's understanding of the text. But every conscientious student of the *Second Discourse* will henceforth have to take his edition into account.

Indeed, this is primarily a study edition. It does not bring us face to face with Rousseau's text, or with an unadorned translation of the text; rather, it presents us with that text learnedly and exhaustively footnoted. The notes provide detailed editorial information, identify sources and references, situate given passages in their broader context, or call attention, sometimes rather pointedly, to Rousseau's real or presumed meaning and intentions.

Meier is particularly sensitive to the relations between authors and readers, in other words to problems of rhetoric. Both in his Introduction and in numerous notes throughout the book he reminds us of the ever-present threat of civil and ecclesiastical censorship under which Rousseau and his contemporaries wrote, and he calls attention to the places where that threat clearly influenced the text of the *Discourse*. At the same time, he is mindful of the self-censorship one would expect from the author of the *First Discourse*. That self-censorship manifests itself perhaps most clearly in the distinction which Rousseau draws between his different addresses: Geneva, in the Epistle Dedicatory (pp. 118–28); the likes of Plato and Xenocrates whom, in the Exordium and in the concluding paragraph of Part I, he calls his “Judges,” and in the penultimate paragraph of the *Discourse* he calls “attentive readers” (pp. 140, 169, 197); and those whom, in the last paragraph of Part I, he calls “vulgar readers” (p. 169, cp. p. 135). Thus, while many commentators continue to see the Epistle Dedicatory to Geneva as nothing more than Rousseau's somewhat naive, idealized vision of his native city, Meier convincingly restates the view that it is a sophisticated and self-conscious political document designed to help heal the deep divisions between the party of the Citizens and the ruling patriciate that had repeatedly brought the city to the brink of civil war during the preceding half century. In the letter to Perdriau which Meier includes in his volume, Rousseau very clearly states that such had indeed been the intention of the Epistle Dedicatory.

Now, the most perplexing rhetorical problem posed by the *Discourse* is how to make coherent sense of what Rousseau says about the state of nature: is it conjectural or is it factual; what are the consequences of deciding that it is the one rather than the other; what may be Rousseau's reasons for stating his argument in a way that appears to leave this an open question? The issue arises with the very first passage which Meier examines closely in the Introductory Essay he devotes to “The Rhetoric and Intention” of the *Discourse*, namely Rousseau's often quoted invitation to the reader to begin by setting aside all the facts.

It did not even enter the mind of most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of Nature had existed, whereas it is evident, from reading the Holy Scriptures, that

the first Man, having received some lights and precepts immediately from God, was not himself in that state, and that if the Writings of Moses are granted the credence owed them by every Christian Philosopher, it has to be denied that, even before the Flood, Men were ever in the pure state of Nature . . .

Let us therefore begin by setting aside all the facts, for they do not affect the question. The Inquiries that may be pursued regarding this Subject ought not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin (p. 139).²

Meier agrees with the long line of scholars who have seen that the facts we are here invited to set aside are what might be called “the biblical facts.” He further agrees with those scholars who have argued that the biblical facts are the only facts we are invited to set aside in the *Discourse*, and that we should therefore not accept at face value Rousseau’s repeated assertions that his account of the state of nature in Part I of the *Discourse* is conjectural, but should, instead, take that account as having been intended to be factual.³ That reading is open to question.⁴

I.1 The invitation to set aside all the facts is certainly an invitation to set aside “the biblical facts:” “Let us *therefore* begin . . .” But Rousseau’s formulation also indicates a distinction between the biblical account—“the Writings of Moses”—on the one hand, and the theological interpretation of that account—“the credence owed them by every Christian Philosopher”—on the other. He sets aside the theological interpretation of the biblical account far more categorically than he sets aside the account itself.

Just before inviting the reader to set aside all the facts, he had remarked that

2. All otherwise unidentified page references throughout this essay are to *The First and Second Discourses together with the Replies to Critics and the Essay on the Origin of Languages*, edited, translated, and annotated by Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); references to the Pléiade edition of Rousseau’s *Œuvres complètes* are indicated by *OC*, followed by volume and page numbers.

3. For Rousseau’s use of “conjecture,” see *op. cit.*, Index. Diderot had but lately called for bold, basic scientific experiments, which he called “conjectures,” but had originally thought of calling “reveries:” “ . . . I will call *Revery* what others might call a *System*.” *Pensées sur l’interprétation de la nature*, Varloot and Diekmann eds., in *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. IX (Paris, 1981) p. 49, n.T, and nos xxxi–xxxviii. Half a century later, Dugald Stewart came to speak of “*Theoretical or conjectural history*; an expression which coincides pretty nearly in its meaning with *Natural History*, as employed by Mr. Hume—see his *Natural History of Religion*—and with what some French writers have called *Histoire Raisonnée*.” “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith” (1793); in *Works* (1829), vii, 31f. cp. vi, 4; discussed by Hans Medick, *Naturzustand und Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), especially in Exkurs II, pp. 305–13; R. L. Emerson surveys “Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers,” in *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers 1984 Communications historiques*, pp. 63–90; and Nietzsche is writing “*Naturgeschichte der Moral*” in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part VI.

4. As C. E. Vaughan had already indicated: *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1915, Vol. I, p. 13, n. 3.

it had never so much as occurred to most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of nature had existed, although “Christian Philosophers” have to deny that man was ever in the pure state of nature. Now, the “state of nature” and the “pure state of nature” are not, strictly speaking, the same state. As Rousseau well knew, the expressions “state of nature” and “pure state of nature” play a role in two very different traditions, the theological tradition, and the philosophical tradition. More precisely, Christian theologians traditionally distinguish between the state of pure nature (*pura natura* or *in puris naturalibus*), the state of corrupted or fallen nature, and the state of restored nature or of grace. By mid-seventeenth century the status of the “state of pure nature” had become a central issue in the differences dividing the Jansenists and the neo-scholastics. The neo-scholastics had come to use “state of pure nature” to refer to the state, actual or conjectural, of man or of the world without—prior to—supernatural destination, aspiration, or assistance. They had accordingly also come to distinguish between natural law considered from the point of view of pure nature or the unaided human reason, that is, purely natural law; and natural law considered from the point of view of grace which, although it is supernatural rather than natural, is nevertheless said to be natural “in a relative sense.”⁵ The Jansenists, on the other hand, categorically rejected the very possibility of a state of pure nature. Jansenius, borrowing a metaphor of Augustine’s, allowed no more difference between the state of pure and the state of fallen nature than between being undressed and being naked, and he regarded all speculation about the state of pure nature as tantamount to a revival of Pelagianism.⁶ Rousseau is evidently alluding to this debate when he says that the biblical account does not allow for the pure state of nature; and when he adds that therefore what he will say about mankind and about the earth

5. “ . . . quia etiam gratia habet suam propriam essentiam, et naturam, cui connaturale est lumen infusum, cui etiam connaturale est non solum dirigere homines ad rectam, et honestam, ac debitam operationem supernaturalem, sed etiam depellere tenebras, et errores circa ipsammet legem purè naturalem, et sub altiori ratione praecipere ipsiusmet legis naturalis observationem. Sic ergo lex naturalis duplex distingui potest, una purè naturalis, alia simpliciter supernaturalis, naturalis autem respectivè, per coparationem ad gratiam.” Suarez, *Tractatus de Legibus, et Deo Legislatore* (1612), I, 3, xi, (cp. II, 8, i); while this view may be taken as representative, Suarez does warn that

the philosophers have not recognized man’s supernatural end, but have dealt with a certain felicity in this life, or rather with a certain state conducive to living it in peace and justice . . . However, since it is a doctrine of the faith that men are ordained to the supernatural end of the future life by fitting means that are to be sought after in this life, sacred theology rightly infers that this natural law is necessary for a vastly different reason, and that men require more positive laws than those that philosophers recognize (*op. cit.*, I, 3, x);

see also the passage from Suarez’s *De Gratia* quoted by Starobinski, *OC* III, 1303.

6. Cornelius Jansenius, *Augustinus*, 1640 (Minerva Nachdruck, 1964), Tome II, the last 3 books, pp. 678–980; p. 679; “Statum purae naturae in Ecclesiam introduxerunt Pelegiani,” I, 6, xi, p. 361. For the background of these debates, Étienne Gilson, *Introduction à l’étude de Saint Augustin*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1943), p. 193 n. 1; Henri de Lubac, S. J., *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris: Aubier, 1965), especially pp. 140–44, 152–65, 274f., 284–87; also Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 184 n. 23.

“abandoned to itself” (pp. 140, 142) will be conjectural, he uses the same formula as that used by innumerable theologians who took part in that debate. The issue is most commonly debated in terms of the kind of grace, that is, of freedom of will or of choice, Adam might initially have enjoyed. Rousseau is silent regarding grace, and he postpones any consideration of freedom of choice until much later in the *Discourse* (p. 148). Here he speaks, instead, of Adam prior to “the lights and precepts” which he received “immediately from God,” where “precepts” clearly at the very least refers to God’s:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (*Genesis* 2:17);

and “lights” clearly at the very least refers to the lights needed to understand and to heed that precept.⁷ In a passage which he added while the *Discourse* was in press, Rousseau guardedly indicates that the biblical account—but especially the Divines’ interpretation of that account—will make sense only to

. . . those who will see in the intention of giving from the beginning a morality to human actions which they would not have acquired for a long time, the reason for a precept indifferent in itself and inexplicable in any other System: Those, in a word, who are convinced that the divine voice called all Mankind to the enlightenment and the happiness of celestial Intelligences . . . (p. 213).

The biblical account—but especially the Divines’ interpretation of that account—is at odds with what did or would have happened naturally, to man “abandoned to himself.”

To demur against a useless and arbitrary prohibition is a natural inclination, but which, far from being in itself vicious, conforms to the order of things and to man’s good constitution; since he would not be able to attend to his preservation if he had not a very lively love of himself and of the preservation of all his rights and privileges as he received them from nature. He who could be anything would wish nothing but what would be useful to him; but a feeble Being whose power is further limited and restrained by law, loses a part of himself, and in his heart he reclaims what he is being deprived of. To impute this to him as a crime is to impute to him as a crime that he is what he is and not some other being; it would be to wish at one and the same time that he be and not be. For this reason, the order infringed by Adam appears to me to have been not so much a true prohibition as a paternal advice; a warning to abstain from a pernicious and deadly fruit. Surely this idea conforms better to the idea one should entertain regarding God’s goodness, and even

7. On “precepts,” cp. e.g., Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIV, 12 (quoted in note 8 below); Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, 90–108 *passim*; on negative precepts, Ia IIae, q2 art. 2, *ad sec.*; Suarez, *op. cit.* II, 10, i; the dictates of Hobbes’s natural law are still “precepts”: *Philosophicall Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, or *De Cive* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, the Clarendon Edition of the Philosophical Works of Thomas Hobbes, Vol. III, 1983, H. Warrender ed.), e.g., ch. III *passim*; “A LAW OF NATURE, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a Precept or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden . . .” *Leviathan*, ch. 14; for Rousseau’s use of “precept,” see *Discourses, Replies, Languages, op. cit.*, Index.

to the text of *Genesis*, than do the ideas which Divines are pleased to prescribe to us; for with regard to the threat of the double death, it has been shown that the expression *morte morieris* has not the emphatic meaning which they attach to it, and is only a hebraism [also] used elsewhere [in Scripture], where such an emphasis would be out of place.⁸

The invitation to begin by setting aside the facts is, then, indeed, an invitation to set aside the biblical facts; but it is more particularly an invitation to set aside the orthodox—"the Divines'"—interpretation of these facts: their claim that Adam sinned when he did no more than act according to his nature, and their account of the consequences of Adam's deed. Without explicitly referring to the theological debates surrounding this issue, Rousseau proceeds to give an account of mankind abandoned to itself alone (p. 141). Since on his rather strict reading, the writings of Moses do not allow for man's ever having found himself in that state, he compares his account to the "hypothetical and conditional reasonings" which "our Physicists daily make regarding the formation of the World." It is hypothetical and conditional because otherwise it would clash head-on with the Divines' interpretation and so invite their censure. But it would be a serious error to conclude that that is the only reason why it is conditional and hypothetical, or, as Rousseau also frequently says, conjectural.

8. A *Christophe de Beaumont*, *OC* IV, pp. 939f., note. Regarding the "Divines'" interpretation, e.g.:

If anyone finds a difficulty in understanding why other sins do not alter human nature as it was altered by the transgression of those first human beings, so that on account of it this nature is subject to the great corruption we feel and see, and to death, and is distracted and tossed with so many furious and contending emotions, and is certainly far different from what it was before sin, even though it were then lodged in an animal body—if, I say, anyone is moved by this, he ought not to think that that sin was a small and light one because it was committed about food, and that not bad nor noxious, except because it was forbidden; for in that spot of singular felicity God could not have created and planted any evil thing. But by the precept He gave, God commended obedience, which is, in a sort, the mother and guardian of all the virtues in the reasonable creature, which was so created that submission is advantageous to it, while the fulfillment of its own will in preference to the Creator's is destruction. And as this commandment enjoining abstinence from one kind of food in the midst of great abundance of other kinds was so easy to keep—so light a burden to the memory—and, above all, found no resistance to its observance in lust, which only afterwards sprung up as the penal consequence of sin, the iniquity of violating it was all the greater in proportion to the ease with which it might have been kept. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIV, 12 (M. Dods tr.).

The Vulgate's *morte morieris*, King James's "thou shalt surely die," *Genesis* 2:17 and 3:4, attempts to render the Hebrew "dying you will die"; regarding this expression, see R. Sacks, "The Lion and the Ass," *Interpretation*, 1980, 8:54; for the Divines' interpretation of the double death, see, e.g., *Romans* 5:12–14, Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIII, *passim*; for the heterodox—and polygenist—interpretation, see Isaac de La Peyrère *Proeadamitae* (1655), translated under the title *Men before Adam. Or a Discourse upon the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth Verses of the Fifth Chapter of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans. By which are prov'd, that the first Men were created before Adam* (London, 1656); and *Systema theologicum, ex Proeadamitarium hypothesi* (1655), translated under the title *A Theological System upon that Presupposition that Men were before Adam* (London, 1655). La Peyrère has his pre-Adamites living in the state of nature because they live without and before the Law: *Men before Adam*, ch. XVIII, p. 45.

1.2.1 In the philosophical tradition the expression “state of nature” is, for all intents and purposes, introduced as a term of art by Hobbes: “the state of men without civil society (which state we may properly call the state of nature).”⁹ For all intents and purposes, that remains the most general and the most widely accepted definition of the expression in the philosophical tradition. “State of nature” so understood refers to at least four materially very different conditions, which it is important to distinguish: the state of men prior to the institution of civil society, and so to being civil-ized; the state of members of different civil societies in their relations with one another; the state of men after the dissolution of their common civil society; and the state of sovereign states in their relations with one another. Of these, the first is certainly the condition most commonly referred to by the expression “state of nature.” Formally, then, both the theologians’ and the philosophers’ state of nature are defined by the absence of positive law, be it divine or human. Still, as Jakob Thomasius points out, Hobbes’s “state of nature” most closely corresponds to what the theologians call the “state of corrupted nature”; he ignores what they call the “state of pure—i.e. prelapsarian—nature.”¹⁰

9. *De Cive*, Preface (*ed. cit.*, p. 34); also “the naturall state of men,” *Ibid.*, II, I, Annotation, and II, 13 (*ed. cit.*, pp. 52, 68), which compare and contrast with the use of the expression “naturall state” understood as the right and proper state, *e.g.* III, 25 (*ed. cit.*, p. 72).

10. Thomasius’s remark is reported by his student Leibniz, *Theodicy* I, 221; Pufendorf very explicitly acknowledges as much regarding his own account of the state of nature: see p. 31 below. In a ditty to which readers of the *Second Discourse* will recognize echoes, Voltaire appears to have deliberately run together the theological “state of pure nature” and the philosophical “pure state of nature”:

Mon cher Adam, mon vieux et triste père,
Je crois te voir en un recoin d’Éden
Grossièrement forger le Genre humain
En tourmentant madame Eve, ma mère.
Deux Singes verts, deux Chèvres pieds fourchus
Sont moins hideux au fond de leur feuillée;
Par le soleil votre face halée,
Vos bras velus, votre main écaillée,
Vos ongles longs, crasseux, noirs et crochus,
Votre peau bise, endurcie et brûlée,
Sont les attraits, sont les charmes flatteurs
Dont l’assemblage allume vos ardeurs.
Bientôt lassés de leur sale aventure,
Sous un vieux chêne ils soupent galamment
Avec de l’eau, du millet et du gland;
Ce repas fait, ils dorment sur la dure:
Voilà l’état de la pure Nature.

Le Mondain (1736), lines 46–59

However, elsewhere Voltaire also speaks of “ various places in America where mankind remained in the state of pure nature.” *Essai sur les mœurs* (1765), Ch. 2 (i.f.).

In 1752 the thesis of one abbé de Prades was censured by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne as well as by the Archbishop of Paris; it was condemned to be burned by the Paris Parliament; and Charles de Caylus, Bishop of Auxerre, circulated a Pastoral Letter against it. Diderot, posing as the abbé, wrote a *Defense* of the thesis in the form of a reply to the Bishop’s

1.2.2 On several occasions Hobbes does speak of a state “. . . before such time as men had engag’d themselves by any Covenants or Bonds . . .,” and he refers to that state as the “bare” or “meere” state of nature.¹¹ His sometime secretary, Samuel Sorbière, in whose French translation of the *De Cive* Rousseau would have studied Hobbes, renders “bare state of nature” as *état pure-*

Pastoral Letter. The following passage from that *Defense* illustrates the confusion that could result from wittingly or unwittingly running the two senses of “pure state of nature” together. Again, readers familiar with the *Second Discourse* will recognize verbal echoes of these lines in it.

It seems to me that before accusing me of substituting some fantastic being for man [as depicted] in *Genesis*, it would have been more to the point to inquire whether my thesis dealt with the first man, or with one of his descendants; with man placed in the earthly paradise, or with man wandering over the face of the earth; with innocent man, enlightened and favored with the most extraordinary gifts from heaven, or with corrupted man, banished, and emerging with difficulty from dark ignorance. If M. D’Auxerre had taken this trouble, he would have seen that since man as he now is, is the only man known and acknowledged by the adversaries I had to combat, it was the only man I could place before them; for a discussion can only begin with agreement on some point; and there simply cannot be two reasonable sentiments about the present condition of human nature viewed in terms of its intellectual faculties and the origin of its knowledge. He would have seen that, since I had to derive the successive progress of these [intellectual faculties and knowledge], and to bring man from the moment when he is without any ideas, to the pitch of perfection when he is acquainted even with the profundities of religion; from the point of imbecile nature when he appears to be lower than a number of animals, to the state of dignity when he so to speak has his head in the heavens and is raised by revelation to the rank of the celestial intelligences; I could not take as my model the man who emerged perfect from the hands of his creator, and by himself alone possessed in one instant more enlightenment than his entire posterity together will acquire in all future centuries. If M. D’Auxerre had condescended to make this one observation, he would have spared me many other observations; and his long *Pastoral Letter* would have been shortened by some twenty pages of commonplaces about Adam’s prerogatives and the advantages of the *state of pure nature* which clearly show that the point of my thesis escaped him; that he has not understood anything about what modern philosophers mean by the *state of nature*, and that one could easily hold ideas that are more catholic than his about how theologians should understand the *state of nature*.

In the meantime, and until the Sorbonne instructs him regarding the latter, I shall inform him of what the former is according to the new philosophy. The *state of nature* is not the state of Adam before his fall; that momentary state must be the object of our faith and not of our reasoning. What is at issue among philosophers is the actual condition of Adam’s descendants considered *in herd* (*en troupeau*), and not *in society*; a condition which is not only possible but remains actual, in which all savages live, with which it is entirely permissible to start when one sets out to discover philosophically, not the vanished grandeur of human nature, but the origin and order of its knowledge, in which one recognizes that man has distinctive qualities that raise him above the beast; others that he has in common with it and that keep him on the same level [as it]; finally, defects or, if one prefers, less lively qualities that lower him beneath [it]; a condition which lasts more or less long depending on the circumstances that may lead men to form political societies and to move from the *herd state* to the *state of society*. By *herd state* (*état de troupeau*) I mean the state where men, brought together by the simple prompting of nature, like monkeys, deer, and crows, etc., have not formed any conventions that subject them to duties, nor established any authority that might compel compliance with conventions; and where resentment—that passion with which nature, which attends to the preservation of the beings, has endowed every individual in order to render him formidable to his kind—is the only curb of injustice.” *Suite de l’apologie de M. l’abbé de Prades*,” in Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, Diekman, Proust, Varloot, eds., Vol. IV (1978), pp. 333f.

ment naturel or “purely natural state.” The difference between “the state of nature” without qualification and “the mere or bare state of nature” consists in this, then, that while the state of nature as such is the state of men without common political bonds, the mere or bare state of nature is the state of men without any acknowledged bonds whatsoever. It would for example, be a state without—prior to—the family properly so called, insofar as the family properly so called is by institution.¹² However, even in the *De Cive*, Hobbes does not consistently adhere to the distinction which he here draws between the “bare” or “meere” state of nature, and the state of nature as such. For the most part he uses only the more general expression, and refers to any state short of civil society as the “state of nature.”

In conformity with that practice, Pufendorf, in his turn, defines the state of nature as the state

in which everyone is conceived to find himself at birth by abstracting everything that changes the face of Human Life [and is] established either purely humanly or inspired to man by the Divinity; and among these we understand not only the various Arts together with all the commodities of Life in general, but also Civil Societies ;

so that man in that state would be as if he had fallen from the skies,

. . . entirely abandoned to himself; whose qualities of Mind and Body are as limited as they are now found to be when they have neither been cultivated, nor been assisted by his kind or favored by the extraordinary care of the Divinity.

Pufendorf also refers to the state of nature so defined as “the state of nature considered purely and simply in itself.”¹³ He draws a sharp distinction between this state of nature—“ . . . discovered by Reason alone . . . ”—and “ . . . the more particular and detailed enlightenment provided by Revelation on the same subject . . . ”

Elsewhere Diderot refers to what he here calls the *herd state* as the “pure state of nature”: *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu*, Part II, sect. 2, note 2; on “herds,” cp. Rousseau, *Discourse, Replies, Languages*, *op. cit.*, p. 172, cp. pp. 173, 215, Meier p. 178, cp. pp. 180, 328; but also Plato, *Statesman* 264a–267c; Aristotle, *Politics* I, 2, 1253a8, *History of Animals* 487b34, 488a20; on “celestial intelligences,” see also the last paragraph of Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Note X, quoted on p. 27 above.

11. *De Cive* I, x and Annotation; cf. *ibid.* II 18; v 2; and VIII I as well as *Leviathan* ch. 20 (p. 103 of the 1651 edition, cited in n. 16 below); Robinson Crusoe was at first “ . . . reduced to a meer state of nature.” Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Penguin, 1965), p. 130.

12. Leibniz therefore says, “Mr. Hobbes calls the *natural state* (*l'état naturel*) that which has the least art; perhaps not taking into account that human nature in its perfection involves art (*porte l'art avec elle*).” *Theodicy*, I, 221.

13. *Droit de la nature et des gens*, J. Barbeyrac tr. (second ed., revised and considerably enlarged. Amsterdam: Pierre de Coup, 1712), II, ii, §§ 1, 2, 4. Pufendorf goes farther than the Hobbes of *De Cive*, according to whom men in the state of nature are as if earthborn with respect to “engagements” only: “Let us return again to the state of nature, and consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (*like* Mushromes) come to full maturity without all kind of engagement to each other.” *De Cive* VIII, I.

For example: in order to represent Man's primitive constitution, from which the foundation of natural right is deduced, one abstracts from the *Creation* that is taught us by Sacred History, and figures the first Man fallen, so to speak, from the skies, and [possessed of] the same inclinations men nowadays have on coming into the world; since reasoning alone can take us no farther .

Hence I say that in expounding Natural Right one has to consider *Man as he is since the Fall* .¹⁴

Rousseau accepts Pufendorf's premises and sometimes even uses the same formulations as, for example, when he, in his turn, speaks of mankind and of the earth "abandoned to itself" (pp. 140, 142). Further, like Pufendorf, he follows Hobbes's practice of for the most part referring to the state without any common superior or acknowledged authority "on earth,"¹⁵ in other words the state where "each is judge is his own case," as the "state of nature." However, sometimes, as in the first passage quoted (pp. 24f.), he calls the state without "moral or political inequalities," hence without "moral or political" authority or rule, and indeed without any "moral" relations whatsoever, the "pure" state of nature.¹⁶ Formally, then, his "pure" state of nature corresponds to Hobbes'

14. *Les devoirs de l'homme et du citoyen (The Duties of Man and Citizen)*, J. Barbeyrac tr. (Amsterdam: Pierre de Coup, 1735); Author's Preface, §§ III, VIII; cp. the passage from the Exordium of the *Second Discourse* cited p. 24 above; Pufendorf's statement can be read as an almost word for word rejection of the orthodox position: cp. e.g. Suarez, cited in note 5 above; indeed: "Among other things, dear Sir, I find it rather amusing that he [sc. Veit Ludwig v. Seckendorf] sets forth the theory of the state of integrity [or pure nature]; for when that theory is stated distinctly in terms of our theologians' hypotheses, human life appears so different from what it is now, that there is scarcely any agreement between our natural laws and theirs." ("Unter andern m[ein] h[ochgeschätzter] H[err] sachen gefället mir wohl, daß Derselbe [sc. v. Seckendorf] theorum status integri ausführet; denn wenn solche ex hypothesis nostrorum Theologorum distincte delineiret wird, bekommt das menschliche leben eine solche differente gestalt von dem itzigen, daß unsere leges naturales zu ienen sich am wenigsten reimen soll.") Letter to Christian Thomasius, 9 April 1687, *Briefe Samuel Pufendorfs an Christian Thomasius (1687–1693)*. E. Gigas ed. (Munich & Leipzig: Oldenbourg, 1897), p. 5.

15. For example "Religion commands us to believe that since God himself drew Men out of the State of Nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal because he wanted them to be so." *Second Discourse*, Exordium, in *Discourses, Replies, Languages, op. cit.*, pp. 139f.; "promises to do or to forbear are conventional acts which go outside the state of nature and restrict freedom." *Emile* II, OC IV, 336, Bloom tr., p. 101; "by claiming the right to be obeyed [,] children leave the state of nature almost upon being born . " *Nouvelle Héloïse*, v. 3, OC II, 571.

16. In addition to the passage from the Exordium (p. 139) quoted on p. 24 above, the expression "pure state of nature" occurs in the following contexts: "the immense distance that must have separated the pure state of nature from the need for Languages " p. 154, Meier p. 120; "the goodness suited to the pure state of Nature was no longer the goodness suited to nascent Society . " p. 176, Meier p. 192, which compare with "the pure state of nature is that of all [states] in which men would be the least wicked, the most happy, and the most numerous on earth." Unpublished so-called *Political Fragment*, II # 1, OC III, p. 475, Meier p. 422 #14; "a new State of Nature, different from that which we began in that the first was the state of Nature in its purity, whereas this last is the fruit of an excess of corruption." p. 197, Meier p. 262; "whether in the pure State of Nature the woman is commonly with child again . " and "it is rather difficult to believe that chance encounters or the impulsion of temperament alone would have produced as frequent effects in the pure State of Nature as in that of conjugal Society "

“bare” or “meere” state of nature, and it corresponds even more closely to Pufendorf’s “state of nature considered purely and simply in itself:” it, too, is a state without—and conceivably prior to—rule, bonds, covenants, and hence artifice or conventions of any kind.

In sum: the alternative to the theologians’ state of pure nature is the state of corrupted nature, whereas the alternative to Rousseau’s pure state of nature is the state of men engaged in “moral” relations with one another, and in particular the state of civil society. At the same time, Rousseau’s state of nature, but especially his pure state of nature, differs from the other philosophers’ conceptions of these states primarily because of his insistence on the decisive differences between pre-civil or savage man on the one hand, and civil-ized man on the other.

1.3 The greater the differences between them are assumed to be, the more problematic will be inferences based on the men around us about what men may “originally” have been. Rousseau is the first to have clearly seen, or at least to have clearly stated the central paradox of what has come to be known as historicism: that the reasons why historical inquiries are said to be necessary, are the very same reasons why such inquiries are necessarily conjectural (p. 129).

He is thus led to reflect on how difficult it is

to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man’s present Nature, and to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions . (“Preface,” p. 130).

Note XII, #3, p. 223, Meier p. 358, which compare with Hobbes’s “state of meer Nature; where there are supposed no Lawes of Matrimony; no Lawes for the Education of Children; but the Law of Nature, and the naturall inclination of the Sexes, one to another, and to their Children.” *Leviathan*, ch. 20, p. 103. To my knowledge, this is the only occurrence of the expression “state of nature” in the *Leviathan*, where Hobbes’s preferred expression is *condition* as in “natural condition” or “condition of mere nature.” Rousseau did not know the *Leviathan* at first hand.

“Pure state of nature” in the exclusively formal, legal sense, does not occur in the *Second Discourse*. It does occur in the *Discourse on Political Economy*: “as soon as one man claims to subordinate another without regard to the laws, he immediately leaves the civil state and places himself in relation to that other in the pure state of nature where obedience is never prescribed except by necessity.” [19]; cp. “But if the Prince is above the laws[,] he lives in the pure state of nature and owes accounts neither to his subjects nor to anyone for any of his action.” Unpublished fragment known as *The State of War*, OC III, p. 603.

According to some readers, any attempt to understand Rousseau’s “pure” state of nature must also account for every occurrence of “primitive” as in “primitive state” or “primitive condition.” Yet in at least one critical passage they are manifestly not interchangeable: *Discourses, Replies, Languages*, *op. cit.* p. 176, quoted on p. 36 below. However, in the *Second Discourse* “man in the pure state of nature” is interchangeable with “natural man” (*op. cit.* pp. 130, 132, 168, 207). In the *Émile*, by contrast, Rousseau warns “The difference is considerable between natural man living in the state of nature, and natural man living in the state of society” (OC IV, 483, Bloom, tr. p. 205), which is as much as to say that “the pure state of nature” has not the status of fact; and would seem to be the reason why the expression does not occur in the *Émile*.

Now, the state of nature broadly speaking, the state of man “without civil society,” certainly did exist, does now exist, and will continue to exist. It is, most particularly, the state of “the Savage Peoples known to us” (pp. 176; 165, 173; Meier pp. 190; 156, 180).¹⁷ But a state of man without—and conceivably prior to—any acknowledged authority, rules, covenants, or moral relations, and hence without—or prior to—artifice or convention of any kind, may well not ever have existed; it certainly does not now exist; and it is most unlikely to exist hereafter. Human life may always, everywhere, necessarily, be a mixture of the natural and the artificial or conventional, and it may be perfectly “natural” that this be so. In order to know the state of man free of artifice or convention, one is therefore compelled to conjecture.

Such conjectures will, of course, not be arbitrary. Still,

Let my Readers . . . not imagine that I dare flatter myself with having seen what seems to me so difficult to see. I have initiated some arguments; I have hazarded some conjectures . . . (p 130).

However compelling one may find Rousseau’s conjectures in Part I of the *Discourse*, they remain conjectures. He knew that they are conjectures; he said that they are conjectures; and he very clearly spelled out the reasons why they necessarily are conjectures quite independently of the biblical account, of the risks involved in contradicting or “abstracting from” it, or of any rhetorical considerations. They are conjectures because of the nature of the problem he set himself.¹⁸

The difficult *rhetorical* question is: when—and why—does Rousseau fail to make it clear whether he is speaking about the “pure” state of nature or about the state of nature without qualifications. One effect, and presumably one intention of his failure to do so, is to leave readers with the impression that his account is far more radical than it in fact is. But unless one remains attentive to the distinction between the two states, it is impossible to make consistent sense of the *Discourse*, let alone of its relation to Rousseau’s other writings on these subjects.

17. Rousseau is not alone in using “savage” interchangeably with “in the state of nature,” in contrast to “in the civil state” and hence “civil-ized”; cp. for example, Hobbes, *De Cive*, VIII, 18; or “ . . . in the wild State of Nature . . . ” “ . . . wild People must have an Instinct to understand one another, which they lose when they are civiliz’d.” Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, Part II, The Sixth Dialogue; F. B. Kaye ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), Vol. II, pp. 286, 285; and some naturalists—e.g. Buffon and, a full century later, Darwin—classify animals as either “in the state of nature” or “domestic.” The political implications are clear, and Rousseau repeatedly calls attention to them.

18. Harald Weinrich reaches a similar conclusion on strictly linguistic grounds: the verb forms in Part I of the *Discourse* are primarily discussive (*besprechend*), and in Part II predominantly narrative (*erzählend*). “Erzählte Philosophie oder Geschichte des Geistes: linguistische Bemerkungen zu Descartes und Rousseau.” *Geschichte—Ereignis und Erzählung*, R. Koselleck and W.-D. Stempel eds. (Munich: W. Fink, 1973). pp. 411–26; see pp. 424f.

2. In the last paragraph of Part I Rousseau considers how best to proceed when

. . . two facts given as real are to be connected by a sequence of intermediate facts . . . that are unknown or believed to be so . . . (p 169).

In Meier's view the "two facts given as real" are what he calls "the starting point" and "the end point" of the development which Rousseau sets out to reconstitute in the *Discourse*. He takes the "starting point" to be the account of man in the "pure" state of nature that took up so much of Part I of the *Discourse*, and the "end point" to be the account of man in contemporary despotisms. Although he acknowledges that the first is not a "fact given as real" in the same sense that the second is, he proceeds, here and throughout his commentary, as if it were.¹⁹ Is it a fact in any sense of the term? Does not Rousseau's remark about the "two facts given as real . . ." allow for, indeed does it not require a different, more natural and more plausible reading?

Rousseau is outlining what he proposes to do in Part II of the *Discourse*, and how that plan is related to what he did in Part I:

to consider and bring together the various contingencies that can have perfected human reason while deteriorating the species, make a being wicked while making it sociable, and from so remote a beginning, finally bring man and the world to the point where we now find them (p. 168, Meier, p. 166).

He then goes on to review some of the difficulties he faces in carrying out this plan in view of

. . . the impossibility of on the one hand rejecting certain hypotheses without, on the other, being in a position to attach to them the certainty of facts; . . . two facts given as real [that] are to be connected by a series of intermediate facts

In the context of this program, it seems more natural and plausible to read the remark about the "two facts given as real" as saying: "man and the world

19. See Meier, footnote 212, p. 168; cp. footnotes 94, 202, 215, 448; so, too, L. Strauss: "At the end of the First Part of the bipartite work, Rousseau calls the state of nature a 'fact': the problem consists in linking 'two facts given as real' 'by a sequence of intermediate and actually or supposedly unknown facts.' The given facts are the state of nature and contemporary despotism." *Natural Right and History*, *op. cit.*, p. 267 n. 32; so, too, V. Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: Les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), pp. 390f., 755. J. Derrida, following J. Mosconi, also interprets Rousseau's pure state of nature as the initial or earliest, i.e. "factual" stage of the state of nature. Most of the difficulties he encounters in his deconstruction of Rousseau's accounts of origins can be traced to that interpretation. A further problem with that interpretation is perhaps most succinctly indicated by the fact that Derrida routinely refers to Rousseau's pure state of nature as the state of pure nature, an expression and a concept that may be found in Buffon (see p. 55), Voltaire, or Diderot (see note 10 above), but never in Rousseau: *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), e.g., pp. 329f., 337, 357f., 387; *Of Grammatology*, G. Spivak tr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 231f., 236f., 252f., 274; J. Mosconi "Analyse et genèse: Regards sur la théorie du devenir de l'entendement au XVIIIe siècle (1)," *Cahiers pour l'analyse* No. 4, 1966, p. 75.

. [at] the point where we now find them” is one fact given as real: there are political societies, some of which have disintegrated into the most extreme despotism and may therefore be said to have returned to the state of nature in the formal sense of that expression (p. 197). It is another fact given as real that there are “savages” whose way of life is such as modern travellers and ancient sources have reported; in other words, there is a historical, that is, a pre-political “state of nature.”

In this factual state of nature,

. . . everyone punishing the contempt shown him in a manner proportionate to the stock he set by himself, vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel. This is precisely the state reached by most of the Savage Peoples known to us; and it is for want of drawing adequate distinctions between ideas and noticing how far these Peoples already were from the first state of Nature, that many hastily concluded that man is naturally cruel and that he needs political order in order to be made gentle [*l'adoucir*], whereas nothing is as gentle [*doux*] as he in his primitive state when, placed by Nature at equal distance from the stupidity of the brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man . . . (p. 176).

The many who drew this hasty conclusion erred because they attributed to savage man the needs and passions of civilized man. They fallaciously reasoned *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. As a result of this error, they also erred regarding natural right and the true foundations of the body politic (pp. 131, 132, 133, 153, 159f., 224f.). In particular, they mistakenly assumed that the manifest cruelty and bloodthirstiness of most of the savage peoples known to us are ingredient to human existence. They failed to recognize that they are derivative, the by-products of complex and possibly contingent developments in men's material and “moral” lives. They failed to recognize that “most of the savage peoples known to us” are not men in the “first state of nature.” Reason and tradition alike point to conditions more primitive than those of the savage peoples known to us. Rousseau therefore assigns most of the savage peoples known to us to a second stage of the state of nature, a stage which begins with the establishment of separate, stable, sedentary families settled in huts (p. 173), and which by and by gives way to a third and final stage in the state of nature with the introduction of metallurgy and agriculture (p. 177), the enclosure and division of land (pp. 179, 170), and the attendant and irreversible division of labor (pp. 177, 179f.). The second or middle stage of the state of nature, the stage of “most of the savage peoples known to us,” is also the stage of “beginning” or “nascent” society (pp. 176, 182).²⁰ In the preceding, first stage of the state of nature, men lead a nomadic life in more or less loosely structured bands or “troops” (pp. 173, 262f.) possessing languages “approximately like those which various savage nations still have today” (p. 173), languages which

20. But never “société sauvage”: Meier, footnotes 237, 238.

contain at least some articulated, that is, conventional and instituted sounds, and which therefore count as human languages proper in the strictest sense (pp. 173, 244, 248). Their life is certainly not simply free of artifice and conventions. It certainly does not represent the “pure” state of nature, understood as the state without—and conceivably prior to—all artifice and convention. Rousseau never claims to have any facts regarding such a state or stage. The only means by which to get to know it, the only means by which “to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man’s present nature,” is, as he frequently says, to “meditate” on the available facts and alternatives, and to try to frame hypotheses which cannot be refuted, even if they cannot be asserted as facts. The quest for the putative pure state of nature is a thought-experiment, a systematic “bracketing” of all artifice and of all moral needs and relations; and hence also of all the conditions necessary for artifice and moral needs and relations: “[b]y stripping the Being so constituted . . .” (p. 141; Meier, p. 78). It is an exercise in “analysis.” The course of this regressive analysis is guided by the two facts “given as real”: the savages “known to us,” and civil or civilized man. The most distinctive feature of this regressive analysis is the effort to avoid drawing any *post hoc ergo propter hoc* inferences as, in Rousseau’s view, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, and indeed all of his predecessors did. As far as possible the conclusions of the regressive analysis will be confirmed by facts. But the farther the analysis moves beyond the state of the savages known to us, the farther the realm of fact recedes and fades into conjecture. The aim of the analysis is in any event not to establish fact. It is to extrapolate to the limits or conditions of humanity. These limits or conditions are not in any sense of the term “facts,” let alone “facts given as real.”²¹ They are “general

21. Rousseau sketched the rhetorical and methodological strategy of the *Second Discourse* in a fragment believed to have been drafted a full ten years earlier:

The books of the Philosophers are filled with Laws and maxims . . . pertaining to two general methods. One, which they call synthesis or method of composition by means of which one goes from the simple to the composite and uses to teach to others what one knows; the other which they call Analysis or method of resolution and which one uses in learning what one does not know; for example, when inquiring into a family’s genealogy, one traces it backward from the present, relation by relation, ancestor by ancestor, to its origin; that is the Analytic way. After which a table is drawn up, with the one who has been discovered to be the founder of the house at its head, [and] moving forward generation by generation right up to the present, that is synthesis . . . I would, then, wish always to begin my discussions with the weakest proofs. In some fields, the most convincing arguments are drawn from the heart of the matter itself; such are questions of Physics. Knowledge of the nature of plants may, for example, well be furthered by knowledge of the soil in which they thrive, the fluids that nourish them, their specific properties, but their mechanism and springs will never be properly known without examining them in themselves, without considering their total internal structure, their fibers, volvules, tracheae, bark, pith, leaves, flowers, fruit, roots and, in a word, all the parts that go into their makeup. In moral inquiries, by contrast, I would begin by examining the little we know about the human mind, taken in itself and considered singly, I would gropingly derive from it some few obscure and uncertain conclusions, but soon abandoning this dark labyrinth, I would hasten

causes" or "principles":²² at a minimum, beings who are physically constituted as the human beings we know are constituted, whose needs and powers are in balance, who are therefore materially and psychologically self-sufficient, that is, free, hence morally and politically equal, and thus "good"; and who are

to examine man in his relations and derive from them a host of luminous truths that would dispel the uncertainty of my arguments and would be seen in an even clearer light by comparison. "Idée de la méthode dans la composition d'un livre," *OC* II, pp. 1244f.; see also, *Émile* III, *OC* IV, 434, and *Émile* V, *OC* IV, 837; Bloom tr. pp. 171, 459, with the warnings: *Discourse*, 159f., and *OC* III, 611f.

Consider also Hobbes's account of his procedure:

There is a certain Clue of Reason, whose beginning is in the dark, but by the benefit of whose Conduct, we are led as 'twere by the hand into the clearest light, so that the Principle of Tractation is to be taken from that Darknesse, and then the light to be carried thither for the irradiating its doubts. As often therefore as any writer, doth either weakly forsake that Clue, or wilfully cut it asunder, he describes the Footsteps, not of his progresse in *Science*, but of his wandrings from it. And upon this it was, that when I applied my Thoughts to the Investigation of Naturall Justice, I was presently advertised from the very word *Justice*, (which signifies a steady Will of giving every one his *Own*) that my first enquiry was to be, from whence it proceeded, that any man should call any thing rather his *Own*, than *another mans*. And when I found that this proceeded not from Nature, but Consent, (for what Nature at first laid forth in common, men did afterwards distribute into severall *Impropriations*) I was conducted from thence to another Inquiry, namely to what end and upon what Impulsives, when all was equally every mans in common, men did rather think it fitting, that every man should have his Inclosure; And I found the reason was, that from a Community of Goods, there must needs arise Contention whose enjoyment should be greatest, and from that Contention all kinds of Calamities must unavoidably ensue, which by the instinct of Nature, every man is taught to shun. Having therefore thus arrived at two maximes of humane Nature, the one arising from the *concupiscible* part, which desires to appropriate to it selfe the use of those things in which all others have a joynt interest, the other proceeding from the *rationall*, which teaches every man to fly a counternaturall Dissolution, as the greatest mischief that can arrive to Nature; Which Principles being laid down, I seem from them to have demonstrated by a most evident connexion, in this little work of mine, first the absolute necessity of Leagues and Contracts, and thence the rudiments both of morall and of civill Prudence. *De Cive*, Epistle Dedicatory, Warrender ed., p. 26f.

For the background of the contrast between the analytic and the synthetic methods, see Richard Kennington, "Analytic and Synthetic Methods in Spinoza's *Ethics*," in *The Philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. Studies in philosophy and the history of philosophy*, Vol. 7, R. Kennington ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1980), pp. 293–318.

At the end of Part I of the *Discourse*, Rousseau speaks of having dug to the genuine state of nature, *le véritable état de nature* (p. 166), which Meier translates *der wahrhafte Naturzustand* (Meier, p. 161); but in his note 80, p. 166, he "quotes" that passages as if it spoke of the true—*der wahre*—state of nature, an expression which Rousseau nowhere uses; see also notes 215 and, especially, 135 and 448. A similar error unfortunately slipped into *Discourses, Replies, Languages*, *op. cit.*, p. 344, note *ad* II[4]; also, p. 29 line 7, and p. 130 line 19, where for "true" read "genuine." Admittedly it is difficult to translate *véritable* consistently; and in at least some cases, Rousseau may have chosen it in preference to *vrai* for reasons of euphony. However, that cannot have been his reason for choosing to speak about *la véritable jeunesse du Monde*, "the genuine youth of the World" (p. 177), which, as Meier notes (p. 194, note 240) directly alludes to Lucretius, but which, it must be added, does so by taking issue with him. It would seem that, at least in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau uses *véritable* to indicate a contrast with the broad tendency of an

“perfectible”—perhaps even almost unlimitedly so (p. 149): potentially human animals, or what in hindsight will prove to have been potentially human animals.

2.1 Rousseau sometimes speaks of “natural” man as in the “animal” state, or condition. For the most part, his “animal state” more or less corresponds to Hobbes’s “brutish,” as in: “. . . and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”²³ It is not necessarily a pre-human or even a particularly primitive human state. Most of the facts which Rousseau cites in support of his conjectures about man in the animal state are not facts about animals or putative animal beginnings, but about the savages “known to us” who are, as we have seen, “at equal distance from the stupidity of the brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man” (p. 176). Thus the very first time he mentions the “animal state”, he is contrasting the development of the senses in savage and in civilized men:

Self-preservation being almost his only care, his [*sc.* savage man’s] most developed faculties must be those that primarily serve in attack and defence. By contrast, the organs that are perfected only by softness and sensuality must remain in a state of coarseness which precludes his being in any way delicate; and since his senses differ in this respect, his touch and taste will be extremely crude; his sight, hearing, and smell, most subtle: Such is the animal state in general, and according to Travellers’ reports, it is also the state of most Savage Peoples (p. 147; Meier, p. 96).

In other words, “the animal state” is—or, more precisely, is also—the state of peoples which, though they may not be civilized, certainly do have language, arts and artifacts, and *mœurs*, morals or customs. The hierarchy or acuity of their senses may point to the condition of the lower animals.²⁴ However, their moral life places them at a considerable remove from it.

The “animal state” would, then, appear to be coextensive with the “state of

alternative account: his is the account of the *véritable état de nature* in contrast to that of the jurists, of Hobbes, and of Locke, because he bases it on reflections and arguments that avoid the fallacies which his predecessors committed; so too, the *véritable jeunesse du monde* is the second, not, as Lucretius had said, the first stage in the history of man and the world; animals which unreliable travelers say are beasts, may perhaps be *véritables* savage men (p. 215).

22. On “general causes” and “principles,” see *Fragments politiques*, OC III, 529, and *Discourses, Replies, Languages*, *op. cit.*, Index; cp. also OC III, 604 and var.(b), and “Idée de la méthode,” *op. cit.*, OC II, 1246. The relation of fact and principle in the *Discourse* is a central theme of Victor Goldschmidt’s important study *Anthropologie et politique: Les principes du système de Rousseau*. Unfortunately his account of that relation is, in the final analysis, incoherent because he too fails to observe the distinction between the state of nature broadly speaking, and the pure state of nature; see n. 19 above.

23. *Leviathan*, ch. 13, *op. cit.*, p. 62; also “For the savage people in *America*, except the government of small families, the concord whereof dependeth on naturall lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in this brutish manner” *idem*, p. 63.

24. Buffon had recently drawn a comparison between the acuity of man’s senses and the animals’: *Discours sur la nature des animaux* (1753) (*Discourse on the Nature of Animals*), in *Œuvres philosophiques*, J. Piveteau ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), pp. 325b36–326b18.

nature.” At times Rousseau extrapolates from this state to the conjectural “pure” state of nature:

Savage Man . . . will then begin with purely animal functions: (X) to perceive and to sense will be his first state, which he will have in common with all animals. To will and not to will, to desire and to fear will be the first and almost the only operations of his soul . . .

the only evils he fears are pain, and hunger; I say pain, and not death; for an animal will never know what it is to die, and the knowledge of death and of its terrors was one of man’s first acquisitions on moving away from the animal condition (pp. 149f.; Meier, pp. 104, 106).

Regardless, now, of how this remark about the animals’ ignorance of death is to be reconciled with Rousseau’s account of pity (pp. 160f.), the claim that animals are ignorant of it is, as Starobinski rightly reminds us in his *Pléiade* edition note, a commonplace. Human beings who are—or are presumed to be—ignorant of death may be said to be in the animal state. That is why Fontenelle had but lately spoken in these terms of a boy born deaf-mute.

He did not really know what death is, and he never thought about it. He led a purely animal life, entirely absorbed by sensible and present objects, and by the few ideas he received through the eyes.

“Animal” here refers to the condition of a human being, albeit to that of a human being whose capacities are limited—or, more precisely, undeveloped—precisely because, as Fontenelle points out, he lacks language. But as Fontenelle goes on to report, before long the boy in question gained hearing, and as soon as he did, he learned language and achieved full human status. Both Condillac and Buffon had quoted and discussed this report in contexts which Rousseau knew well. Indeed Condillac speaks of it in a chapter specifically devoted to the issue which Rousseau raises in the immediate sequel to the remark about death in the animal and the human condition: the confirmation of conjecture by fact.²⁵

When he does draw comparisons between animal and human behavior at its most primitive, Rousseau invariably does so with qualifications (pp. 160f., 173); or, as when he compares animal and human sexuality, he does so in order to underscore the differences, not the similarities between man and the other animals (pp. 221–23 regarding which see pp. 51f. below; 165f.; cp. 153 with 222f.).²⁶

Formally speaking, man may be said to be in the animal state or condition as long as—to the extent that—he remains under the sway of exclusively

25. Buffon, *De l’homme*, M. Duchet ed. (Paris: Maspéro, 1971), pp. 199f.; Condillac, *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* Part I, section 4, chapter 2, § 13.

26. In contrast, for example, to Plato, *Laws* VIII, 836c; a passage cited by Pufendorf in connection with his assertion that conclusions about human conduct based on animal behavior persuade only the vulgar: *Droit, op. cit.* II, 3, § i i f.

“physical” impulsions, that is to say subject to the law of nature or of the stronger (pp. 132f., 175f., 184f.); he may be said to have left the animal state insofar as he acts in terms of “moral” relations and constraints within the context of society and in particular of civil society, in other words insofar as he becomes “sociable” and civil-ized.²⁷

Certainly nothing Rousseau says about man in the animal state or condition permits us to conclude that he thinks that man in the “pure” state of nature, man isolated, speechless, and without artifice or moral relations of any kind, is a fact “given as real.” He never goes beyond positing and discussing man either in the “pure” state of nature, or in what by analogy might be called the “pure animal state”—“the state of animality” (p. 224)—as an hypothesis or a conjecture.²⁸

2.2 In a Note which many readers have found especially striking, Rousseau, reflecting on the “varieties which a thousand causes may produce, and indeed have produced in the human species,” is led to wonder whether

various animals similar to [or like] men [*semble aux hommes*] which travelers have without much observation taken for Beasts, either because of some differences they noticed in their outward conformation, or merely because these Animals did not speak, might not indeed be genuine Savage men [*de véritables hommes Sauvages*] whose race, dispersed in the woods in ancient times, had had no occasion to develop its virtual faculties, had not acquired any degree of perfection, and was still in the primitive state of Nature (Note X, pp. 214f.).²⁹

The reports which prompted these musings and which Rousseau goes on to quote at some length, tell of animals similar to man (*[qui] ont une ressem-*

27.

This passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and by endowing his actions with the morality which they previously lacked. It is only when the voice of duty succeeds physical impulsion and right succeeds appetite that man, who until then had looked only after himself, sees that he is forced to act on other principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although in this state he deprives himself of many advantages he holds from nature, he gains such great ones in return, his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas enlarged, his feelings ennobled, his entire soul exalted to such a degree that if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him below that from which he emerged, he should ceaselessly bless the happy moment that wrenched him from it forever, and out of a stupid and limited animal made an intelligent being and a man. *Of the Social Contract*, I, 8; cp. *Geneva ms.*, OC III, p. 292.

28. Writing to the Archbishop of Paris, Rousseau says that in the *Discourse on Inequality* he describes man as initially “bête,” that is to say “stupid” or “dumb,” but not, as some commentators erroneously and tendentiously have it, “a beast”: *A Christophe de Beaumont*, OC IV, 936; consider also *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, (*Discourses, Replies, Languages*, op. cit., p. 268n) and compare with *Discourse on Inequality*, Note X (*ibid.*, p. 217). Meier, incidentally, very correctly calls attention to the fact that Rousseau never refers to man as a beast.

29. This is the Note which Rousseau appended to the passage quoted on p. 40 and which opens: “Savage Man will, then, begin with purely animal functions. ”

blance exacte avec l'homme) walking through the forest in Indian file, gathering around fires, building themselves shelters, and burying their dead; of African "orangs" so similar to man (*si semblable[s] à l'homme*) that some travellers—but not the natives—thought them offsprings of humans and monkeys; of stories that some of these beings force themselves on girls and women; and of Merolla's report that the natives occasionally capture savage men and women, which Purchas, after many others, says must be the Ancients' *satyrs*. The picture labelled "Orang Outan" accompanying these reports in the *Histoire des Voyages* in which Rousseau read them, depicts a strikingly human-looking—"anthropomorphic"—being. It is not difficult to see how Rousseau, reflecting on such reports, might have been led to conjecture that they are really reports of encounters between members of the same species who, although they look or act strange and wild in one another's eyes and especially in the eyes of the traders and adventurers on whose accounts he for the most part depends, are nonetheless human. Nor is it difficult to see how he might have gone on to wonder why the travellers who report about animals that exhibit such striking similarities to our species (*des conformités frappantes avec l'espèce humaine*) should nevertheless be reluctant to call them human beings. He is thus led to suggest—discreetly, as the commentators point out, but also, one cannot help suspect, tongue in cheek—that the question whether orangs or similar animals belong to the human species could be settled to the satisfaction of the "crudest observers" by a simple experiment which, as he adds, could be performed innocently only if its outcome were known from the outset.

In order to understand such musings, one has to bear in mind that the question whether orangs or similar monkeys (*singes*) might be lost tribes of primitive men simply did not mean for Rousseau and his contemporaries what it means for us. There is no plain French or German equivalent for the distinction between "monkey" and "ape". As Tinland, in particular, has pointed out,³⁰ and as Meier reminds us, the most learned men of the time had seen fewer apes and knew less about them than any visitor of a modern zoo. They did not even know enough about them to challenge the travellers' reports of orangs in Africa. They did, however, know, and Rousseau specifically mentions, that *orang-outan* is Malay for *man of the woods* (p. 216): and he certainly knew that *homo sylvestris* is how Lucretius referred to "the first men."³¹ So that when he wonders whether the orang might be a variety of man he must be understood to wonder whether certain animals described by travellers as closely resembling man—Rousseau's and Linnaeus's "anthropomorphic"—and called "men of the woods" by the natives who knew them best, might not be just that. That does not seem to be such an extravagantly bold suggestion. Nor does it seem particularly bold to go on to wonder in this context

30. F. Tinland, *L'homme sauvage* (Paris: Payot, 1968), pp. 94–97.

31. *On the Nature of Things*, C. Bailey ed., e.g. V, 967, 970.

whether other apes, called pongos and enjokos, and said to be like the orang, might not be primitive human beings. Nor, again, does it seem particularly bold to wonder whether the travellers called certain animals apes—or, more precisely, “monkeys”—rather than men because they were stupid. After all, he quite rightly stresses that most of these travellers are themselves not particularly bright or trustworthy. Rousseau's point is not that human beings are “really” apes, let alone that they are “descended” from apes, but that most traders, adventurers, and missionaries are likely to be crude observers who might well mistake unfamiliar-looking-and-acting members of their own kind (*leurs semblables*) for apes, just as Purchas, the compiler of one of the major anthologies of travellers' reports, calls “satyrs” the beings which Merolla, a sensible, educated, Franciscan missionary, reporting at firsthand, said were “Savage men and women” (pp. 216, 218). His concern in this Note, and throughout the *Discourse* as a whole, is not with what man may have in common with beasts or, for that matter, with “celestial intelligences,” but with what differentiates them from beasts and celestial intelligences, with the full range and variety of humankind; and it is out of this concern that he invites his reader to consider the possibility that some of the beings which crude observers call apes, or sylvans, or fauns or satyrs, may, as he put it in a later addition to the text, prove to be “neither beasts nor gods, but men” (p. 218; cp. p. 213, cited p. 27 above).

Meier recognizes how central this concern with the full range and variety of mankind is to the *Discourse*, and he very correctly points out that Rousseau deliberately excludes from consideration questions about evolution or transformism which contemporary readers are particularly likely to raise. Yet his own emphases and comments repeatedly prompt his readers to raise these very questions. In particular, he maintains that Rousseau's readiness to envisage the possibility that some of the beings which crude observers call apes or satyrs may be human beings marks the culminating point of the *Discourse*, and that the fact that it does conclusively proves the *Discourse*'s “philosophically radical and scientifically serious character.”³² By imposing this particular order on the text, by reading it as asserting that it is “a fact given as real” that man's “starting point” is the state of animality (note 211, pp. 168f.), and as culminating in the conjecture that oranges, or pongos, or enjokos, are that starting point, Meier invites the transformist or even evolutionist reading of the

32. Meier believes that Rousseau thought so too, and that he indicated as much by placing these reflections at the very center of the Notes which he appended to the text: in the middle paragraph of his middle Note (Meier, *op. cit.*, note 409). He gives no other evidence of his claim that this is the philosophical highpoint of the *Discourse*. Yet in the very same passage in which he stresses the importance of the message in the middle paragraph, he acknowledges that Rousseau had stated the general point fully and clearly in the very first paragraph of his Note. The fact that he restates it in the middle paragraph would therefore seem to be a case of order arising by chance; as well as to confirm Montaigne's warning in the title of the middle essay of the *Essays*.

Discourse which elsewhere he expressly—and rightly—says Rousseau had excluded from consideration (cp. notes 92, 94).³³

Certainly Rousseau's conjecture, if that is not too strong a term, in Note X, that troops of what travellers say are apes, might be lost tribes of primitive man appears to be more radical than the superficially similar conjecture at the end of Part I of the *Discourse* where, speaking about presumably isolated, self-sufficient individuals in a world in which everyone was in the same position, he says that he considers it possible that natural man's potential faculties might have remained eternally dormant (p. 168, Meier p. 166). In Note X, by contrast, he is evidently prepared to envisage the bolder and more puzzling possibility that "perfectibility" and man's other potential faculties might remain dormant even in individuals and groups in contact with men possessing language, arts, and an at least rudimentary, "nascent" society. In part the conjecture appears to be especially bold because, to repeat, we read it as if it were about orangs, chimpanzees, and gorillas, and as if Rousseau knew that it was; whereas what he did know was how little he and his contemporaries knew about these beings, and he repeatedly stresses that the reports which set him to musing on this subject are apt to be misdescriptions of human beings who are

33. It is instructive, in this connection, to contrast his conjectures with Kant's:

What might be nature's aim in letting children come into the world with much crying, since in the bare state of nature [*im rohen Naturzustande*] this exposes both mother and child to the utmost danger? For a wolf or even a pig attracted by that cry could devour the child if the mother is away or exhausted by the birth. Indeed, no animal other than man (as he now is), would *loudly announce* its existence at birth, which seems to have been ordered by the wisdom of nature with a view to preserving their species. Therefore it has to be assumed that in the early [or first] epoch of nature the children of this class of animals were not noisy; but that their being noisy made its appearance later, in a second epoch, when both parents had already attained the [level of] culture [required] for domestic life, without our knowing how and by means of what causes nature brought about such a development. This observation leads far: e.g., to wondering whether, in the wake of a great natural revolution, this second epoch might not be followed by a third, when an orang outhan or a chimpanzee might fashion the organs used in walking, manipulating objects, and speaking, into a human frame containing an organ for the use of the understanding, and gradually develop itself through social culture. *Anthropologie*, Part II, section E, note. Cassirer ed., VIII, p. 222; M. McGregor tr. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), p. 188.

Quite aside from the fact that for transparent prudential or rhetorical reasons Kant projects into the hypothetical future what he clearly thinks occurred in the past, he here speaks about what he calls the bare state of nature categorically and as a fact given as real; Rousseau never speaks that way about what he calls the pure state of nature; and Kant's frankly transformist speculation is without parallel in Rousseau. The only possible hint of anything like it in the *Discourse* is the word "still" at the beginning of Note III:

The changes which a long practice of walking on two feet may have produced in man's structure, the similarities that can still be observed between his arms and the forelegs of Quadrupeds, and the inference drawn from the way they walk, may have given rise to some doubt which way of walking must have been most natural to us (p. 201).

However, the entire point of the Note is that the upright posture has always been natural to man.

only slightly—if at all—stranger than, for example, the pygmies must have been—and indeed were—to the travellers who first came across them. He is skeptical about the reports that they cannot maintain a fire (p. 227; cp. 268*). The fact that they do not speak may no more prove that they lack language, than the fact that children crawl on all fours or that feral men run about on their hands and feet proves that man is a quadruped (pp. 218, 216; 201–203). Rousseau's conjecture in this Note is apt to appear especially puzzling because we tend to think of humankind as one. Yet insofar as these conjectures point to speculations about human origins, they point in the direction of the polygenist rather than of the transformist hypothesis. Rousseau had introduced the conjectures in this Note with the reflection that both ancient and modern reports very clearly indicate that prior to conquests, migrations, and commerce, when peoples lived more isolated, they differed in appearance, size, shape, bearing, and ways far more than they do now (pp. 214f.).³⁴ When, after these reflections, he goes on to wonder whether the beings which travellers have said were beasts might not be savage men anciently “dispersed” in the woods, the remark has to be read in conjunction with the remark in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*:

I call ‘first’ the times of men’s dispersion, regardless of the age one chooses to assign to mankind at that period (p. 260, n.1),

and the indication, two pages below, that the dispersion is post-Noahdic (pp. 262f., 264). In other words, he indicates that he is in effect bracketing the Bible’s ten antediluvian generations; hence he is in effect also bracketing the Bible’s account of a single common origin of mankind. Rousseau was certainly acquainted with polygenist speculations.³⁵ The conjecture that troops of apes

34. Cp. *Émile* v, *OC* iv, p. 830, Bloom tr. pp. 453f. and *Discourses, Replies, Languages, op. cit.*, p. 267*.

35. In a later Note (XVI, p. 228) he refers to an episode from the *Relation du Groenland* (1647) by the most notorious early polygenist, Isaac de la Peyrère, although he prudently avoids naming the work or its author. La Peyrère and Grotius engaged in a polemic about whether the people inhabiting America when Columbus discovered it, were native to the Continent or Greenlanders who had migrated. Grotius argued that they were Greenlanders—or Norwegians, or Icelanders: *De Origine Gentium Americanorum* (1642). La Peyrère argued that they were not, and could not be (*Relation, op. cit.*, pp. 272, 275f.). The episode which Rousseau cites from the *Relation* recalls that debate. It tells of Greenlanders and Icelanders who had been taken no farther than to Denmark, where they became so homesick that some died of it outright, while others died trying to swim back home. The moral of the story is that people so attached to their homeland would certainly not have settled in faraway America. One issue in the debate was whether the Americans were descended from Adam, or not. Grotius held that to deny that they were was to undermine religion. La Peyrère was on record denying on scriptural grounds that they need have been: *Men Before Adam, op. cit.*, ch. viii; *A Theological Systeme, op. cit.*, Book IV, ch. 14. In a later addition to the *Discourse*, Rousseau refers by name to Jan de Laët, the other polygenist who was engaged in a polemic with Grotius on how America might first have been populated (*Discourse, Replies, Languages*, p. 147n). Regarding the polygenist thesis, see also Pufendorf, *Droit*, II, 2, §§ 7, 8. Buffon, after reviewing the arguments for and against America’s having been settled by migrations from Greenland or across the Bering Strait, concludes with the elegant equivocation

might be lost tribes of primitive men is perhaps less implausible in the context of the polygenist hypothesis and its corollary, that the varieties of man may be different subspecies. Be that as it may.

The question whether oranges, pongos, enjokos or, for that matter, satyrs, and fauns are varieties of man—regardless of how such varieties are accounted for—might be answered by mating one of them with an acknowledged human being. Rousseau gives no indication of what he expects the outcome of such an experiment to be. While he leaves open the possibility that oranges and satyrs might be men, he is careful to leave equally open the possibility that they might not be. He says no more than that the outcome would convince “the crudest observers.” Since throughout much of this long Note he explains why he thinks that most travellers are crude observers who cannot be trusted when they say that oranges and similar creatures are apes or satyrs, he is clearly inviting his reader to conclude that the outcome of this experiment would convince even men of the meanest capacity that very Calibans may be human beings. But it is not at all evident that he expects the outcome to settle the issue for reasonable observers. As he points out, the true outcome could, in any event, not be known for at least one, and possibly not for several more generations. For it would remain to be seen whether there is an offspring; and, in case there is one, whether it is a mere sport of nature, a “monster” in the language of this Note, or whether it can have offsprings of its own. Let us suppose that it can have them, and so proves to be a member of the species.³⁶ That would be the only fact which the experiment can possibly establish. It certainly cannot transform the conjectures about the pure state of nature into fact, any more than it can transform into fact the conjecture that oranges or similar beings might be lost tribes of savage men anciently dispersed in the woods who have lived for centuries on end in herds or troops in at least occasional contact with native populations, without developing any of their virtual faculties.

2.2.1 Once we enter into the spirit of such conjectures, we have to allow that if the issue of the experiment should prove to be a human being, its “animal” parent may well be a descendent of outcasts from human communities who after several generations forgot language and whatever arts they may

that, “even independently of the theological reasons,” the Americans’ origin “is the same as our own.” *De l’homme*, M. Duchet ed., p. 311, cp. pp. 309–21; cp. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, ch. 146 (i.p.). For a detailed and thoughtful early account of these debates, see Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, “Dissertation préliminaire sur l’Origine des Américains,” *Journal d’un voyage fait par ordre du Roy dans l’Amérique septentrionale*, Paris: Nyon Fils, 1744, Vol. I, pp. 1–43; the most authoritative current account of these debates is Guillianio Glozzi, *Adamo e il nuovo mondo. La nascita dell’antropologia come ideologia coloniale: dalle genealogie bibliche alle teorie razziali (1500–1700)*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1977.

36. “A species . . . [is] nothing but a constant succession of individuals that are similar [semblables] and together reproduce . . .” Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, Vol. IV (1753), article “The Donkey,” in *Œuvres philosophiques, op. cit.*, p. 356a52–54. For full references to the relevant learned literature, see e.g. Meier, nn. 406f.

have possessed,³⁷ rather than the descendant of potential human beings living for countless centuries together without ever acquiring language or arts of any kind. Its being a human being who had lapsed—or relapsed—into a more primitive stage would certainly be consonant with what Rousseau means by “perfectibility.”³⁸ It would, incidentally, also be consonant with the natives’ story that apes remain silent out of prudence.³⁹

Rousseau invites such speculations when, in order to underscore how unreliable he thinks the travellers are who report that oranges and pongos are apes, he adds that these same travellers would probably have said the same about a feral child who “gave no sign of reason, walked on his hands and feet, had no language, and formed sounds in no way resembling those of a man” (p. 218). Still, it is most unlikely that he thought of entire bands or troops of oranges and pongos as human beings who had relapsed from a state of greater to one of lesser “perfection.” However, he does, on one occasion, appear to consider the more radical alternative of a total loss by all men of all human acquisitions. He had apparently rejected this possibility just before inviting his readers to set all the facts aside, on the grounds that the biblical account requires us to deny it.⁴⁰ Yet in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*—which

37. “Isolated individuals living on desert islands have been known to forget their own language.” *Discourses, Replies, Languages*, p. 264. “At his first coming on board with us, he had so much forgot his Language for want of Use, that we could scarce understand him . . .” Woode Rogers, reporting the rescue of Alexander Selkirk who had lived abandoned on Juan Fernandez Island for nearly four and a half years, and whose story served as Defoe’s model; in Angus Ross ed., *Robinson Crusoe*, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

38.

Why is man alone liable to become an imbecile? Is it not that he thus returns to his primitive state and that, whereas the Beast, which has acquired nothing and also has nothing to lose, always keeps its instinct, man, losing through old age or other accidents all that his *perfectibility* had made him acquire, thus relapses (*retombe*) lower than the Beast itself? (p. 149, Meier pp. 102–104);

cp. also Diderot’s reference to “ . . . the point of imbecile nature when he [sc. man] appears to be lower than a number of animals . . . ” in the passage quoted in note 10 above.

39. Brue tells of a species of red monkeys called *Patas* by the natives who are persuaded that they are “a species of savage men who refuse to speak out of fear of being put to work and sold into slavery.” *Histoire générale des voyages*, Bk. VI, ch. vi (Paris: Didot, 1746), Vol. II, p. 521; see also Bk. IX, ch. viii (Vol. IV, p. 239).

Yesterday I had a visit from the Pastor who, upon seeing that I spoke only in French to him, did not wish to speak to me in English, so that the interview went by with hardly a word being spoken. I rather like this expedient: I will resort to it with all my neighbours, if I have any, and even if I should learn English I will never speak anything but French to them, especially if it is my good fortune that they know not a word of it. That is more or less the ruse of the monkeys which, the Negroes say, do not wish to speak, although they are capable of doing so, for fear that they might be made to work (Rousseau to Hume, 29 March 1766, *Correspondance complète*, R. A. Leigh ed., Vol. XXIX, p. 66).

40.

. . . if the Writings of Moses are granted the credence owed them by every Christian Philosopher, it has to be denied that, even before the Flood, Men were ever in the pure state of Nature,

was not published during his lifetime—he ignores these theological reservations, and refers to the dispersion of Noah’s descendants as just such a relapse into the primitive condition.⁴¹ That “relapse” is a transparent rhetorical

unless they by some extraordinary Occurrence relapsed into it; a Paradox most embarrassing to defend, and altogether impossible to prove (p. 139 Meier p. 70).

They would presumably not be in the pure state of nature after the Flood, because of God’s covenant not to visit any more floods on the earth and its inhabitants (*Genesis* 8:20, 9:9–19), and of the attendant sharp distinction God now drew between man and beast (*Genesis* 9:2–4): it would manifestly be a paradox to have men relapse (*retomber*) into a state they presumably had never been in; but if they were in that state, it would be impossible to prove that they had lapsed into it from some other state, and in particular from a state of grace.

41.

Adam spoke; Noah spoke; granted. Adam had been taught by God himself. When they separated, the children of Noah gave up agriculture, and the common language perished together with the first society. This would have happened even if there had never been a tower of babel. Isolated individuals living on desert islands have been known to forget their own languages. After several generations away from their country men rarely preserve their original language, even when they work together and live in society with one another.

Scattered throughout this vast desert of the world, men relapsed (*retombèrent*) into the dull barbarism they would have been in if they had been born of the earth. By following [the thread of] these entirely natural ideas the authority of Scripture can easily be reconciled with ancient records, and there is no need to treat as fables traditions that are as old as the people that have handed them down to us. (*Discourses, Replies, Languages*, p. 264; cp. *Genesis* 11:1, 6; 10:5, 20, and 19:31f.)

“Although it is known with certainty that the first men early learned the most necessary arts by a very particular effect of Divine Providence . . . Mankind would not have escaped being rather miserable, if Civil Society had not been instituted . . .”, Pufendorf, *Droit, op. cit.* II, 2 § ii. After the mention of the “necessary arts,” Barbeyrac, drawing on Pufendorf’s treatise *De statu hominum naturali*, adds the following pertinent note:

That would appear to be the case from what is said, (*Gen.* 3:21) that *Unto Adam and also to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothed them*; that is to say, in the manner of the Hebrews, that he taught them to make coats. For how could these first men otherwise in so short a time have bethought themselves of such an invention and mastered it by their own efforts, lacking as they did all metal tools, and before the practice of killing animals had been established? From this one can, in my view, further infer that Divine Providence taught them several other things that were no less needful for Human Life, or less difficult to invent. Thus God having expressly commanded our first parents to cultivate the Earth and to eat their bread in the sweat of their brow, he must at the same time have taught them the nature of grain, the season for sowing, how to till the earth and to make bread, all of which they could have discovered by themselves only after protracted experience and reflection. According to History, the Ancient inhabitants of Greece, having lost the use of wheat by I know not what accident, for a long time lived off acorns and wild fruit before the Knowledge of Agriculture was restored among them. Yet the first child of Adam tilled the earth, from which it appears that this Art was already well known and hence that iron was also already in use. As for Fire, the ancient Greeks regarded its invention as so remarkable that they imagined a Prometheus to bring it down from Heaven. It is said about the inhabitants of the *Canary Islands*, of the *Phillipines*, and of the Island off China called *los Jardenas*, that they had no knowledge of Fire at all before the arrival of the *Spaniards*; and they had remained thus ignorant for perhaps several centuries

feint.⁴² The question of whether Noah's descendants must not have preserved some memory of their former language and arts therefore does not arise. However, precisely because their "relapse" is such a transparent feint, it is particularly striking that Rousseau has them relapse not into a "pure" state of nature, but into living in families, and possessing "domestic languages" from the first (pp. 260, 272). At the same time, since this lapse or relapse presumably has all mankind begin—or begin anew—from the same primitive state, it does not answer the question about how troops of men in a presumably "pure" state of nature could have lived for centuries on end in contact with "perfected" human beings and yet not themselves have acquired language or developed *any* of their "virtual faculties." That may well be the reason why Rousseau leaves open the possibility that his experiment will not prove oranges to be humans in the pure state of nature.

2.2.2 But let us set all such speculations aside, and assume that after necessarily prolonged inquiries, they do prove to be human beings in the strictly biological, and only in the strictly biological sense, that, in other words, they do, indeed, prove to be human beings prior to the development of any of their "virtual faculties," prior to the acquisition of language, and of any other skills, arts and conventions; the experiment would still leave unanswered the question which Rousseau had challenged the Aristotles and Plinys of the age to resolve: "What experiments would be necessary in order to come to know natural man; and by what means can these experiments be performed within society?" (p. 130). For the mating experiment would immediately remove both parents and offspring from the "pure state of nature" and plunge

together without being able to recover the use of something so necessary, either by putting their mind to it or by chance. See *Georg Hornius* [1620–1670], *De Origin[ibus] gent[ium] American[is]* Book I, chapter 8, and Book II, Chapter 9. There have also been nations which for a long time did not know the use of Iron although iron mines existed in their own country. It therefore has to be recognized that Divine Providence early taught the first Men these and other necessities of Life. So that if long afterwards Peoples were found among whom the use of some of these things was lost, this is due either to the fact that an arid land fell to their lot; or to the fact that a troop of people, having been forced by the violence of a few ambitious men whom they could not resist, to flee in haste to some remote and utterly desert land, found themselves deprived of all the implements they had been accustomed to use in the place they left; or to the fact that Colonists having gone to settle in some remote country neglected to take their implements with them; or by some accident lost them on the way, after which it was exceedingly difficult to replace them because frequent and regular commerce had not yet been established. However, some few have tried to make up for this loss by using as best they could other substances that are less well-suited to the purposes of Life. Thus several peoples of *America* use oyster shells, Animals bones or teeth, reeds, and similar things instead of Iron. See *Dapper* in his *Description of America*.

42. The device was common; again Pufendorf, *Droit*, II, 2, § iv; Condillac, in a context to which Rousseau refers in his *Second Discourse* discussion of the origin of language (p. 53): *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, Part II, section I, Introduction, with a covering reference to Bishop Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*. As Rousseau points out in the passage cited in

them into a state of highly developed, structured social relations and culture.⁴³ It would therefore not enable us “to know natural man,” and it would leave as conjectural as ever the question of how men might in fact have emerged from the “pure” state of nature, how perfectibility might in fact have come into play, how language and “moral” relations might have originated and developed naturally, in short what is or was the “genealogy” of the human heart,⁴⁴ and of man’s humanity. Yet unless or until these questions are answered, the conjectures which the mating experiment is supposed to resolve necessarily remain what they were from the first: conjectures.

2.3 *The test of how Rousseau understands the pure state of nature must be sought in his discussion of the origin of language, and hence of the origins of “moral” or social relations and in particular of the family. For the problem of the origin of language and that of “moral” relations are inseparable, and the question “which is first, society or language?” frames the discussion of the origin of language in Part I of the *Discourse*.*⁴⁵

2.3.1 In the body of the text, Rousseau formulates the issue as follows:

The first difficulty that arises is to imagine how languages could have become necessary; for, Men having no relationships with one another and no need of any, one cannot conceive the necessity or the possibility of this invention if it was not indis-

the preceding note, after the relapse men are in the condition they would have been in if they had been earthborn.

43.

. since every progress of the human Species removes it even farther from its primitive state, the more new knowledge we accumulate, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all, and . . . in a sense, it is by dint of studying man that we have made it impossible for us to know him (p. 129). For it is no light undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man’s present Nature, and to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately to judge of our present state. Whoever might undertake to ascertain exactly the precautions required to make solid observations on this subject would need even more Philosophy than might be thought; and a good solution of the following Problem does not seem to me unworthy of the Aristotles and the Plinys of our century: *What experiments would be needed in order to come to know natural man; and by what means can these experiments be performed within society?* Far from undertaking to solve this Problem, I believe that I have meditated upon the Subject sufficiently to dare answer in advance that the greatest Philosophers will not be too good to direct these experiments, nor the most powerful sovereigns to perform them: a collaboration which it is scarcely reasonable to expect, especially in conjunction with the sustained or rather the successive enlightenment and goodwill needed by both parties in order to succeed (pp. 130f.).

44. *A Christophe de Beaumont, OC*, IV, 936.

45. “The first difficulty that arises is to imagine how languages could have become necessary; for, men having no relationships with one another and no need of any . . .” (p. 153); “. . . I leave to anyone who wishes to undertake it, this difficult problem: which was the more necessary, an already united society for the institution of Languages, or already invented Languages for the establishment of Society?” (pp. 157f.).

pensible. I would be ready to say, as many others do, that Languages arose in the domestic dealings between Fathers, Mothers and Children: but not only would this fail to meet the objections, it would be to commit the fallacy of those who, in reasoning about the state of Nature carry over into it ideas taken from Society, always see the family assembled in one and the same dwelling and its members maintaining among themselves as intimate and as permanent a union as they do among us, where so many common interests unite them; whereas in this primitive state, without Houses or Huts or property of any kind, everyone bedded down at random and often for only a single night; males and females united fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire, without speech being an especially necessary interpreter of what they had to tell one another; they parted just as readily (XII). The mother at first nursed her Children because of her own need; then, habit having made them dear to her, she nourished them because of theirs; as soon as they had the strength to forage on their own, they left even the Mother . . . (p. 153).

In other words, Rousseau proceeds on the premise that men and women have no “physical” or biological need to live together or to enter into any kind of society with one another. The survival of the species does not require it. The human female no more needs the continued company or assistance of the male, than he needs hers. In particular, she is by nature both inclined and able to provide for her offsprings entirely on her own.⁴⁶

In the Note which he appends to this passage, Rousseau indicates how conjectural these propositions are. He criticizes Locke for apparently denying that the human female is indeed by nature capable of providing for herself and her offsprings entirely on her own, and for therefore apparently arguing in favor of a “physical” basis to “conjugal society” (pp. 221–25). More precisely: In several Notes to the *Discourse* Rousseau explores the possibility that anatomically, or “originally,” humans are herbivores. It would seem reasonable to expect “conjugal society” among herbivores because they require more time and effort than do carnivores to forage and to feed their offsprings; and hence to expect a “physical” basis for having both parents contribute to the care of their offsprings. Yet, once again, the comparison between “physical” man and the other animals leads Rousseau to stress the difference, not the possible similarities between them: even if humans should by nature be herbivores, there is no “physical” basis for “conjugal society” among them. For the upright posture frees the hands and permits the mother to carry her child with her as she moves

46. See also the “Letter to Philopolis,” in *Discourses, Replies, and Languages, op. cit.*, p. 237; Rousseau’s reflection on this subject are continuous with Hobbes’s reflections on parental authority, which conclude: “ . . . original Dominion over children belongs to the Mother, and among men no less than other creatures: The birth follows the belly.” *De Cive*, IX, 3; after summarizing Hobbes’s argument, Pufendorf speaks of “ . . . the purely Natural State (*l’État purement Naturel*), in which there is no conception of either Sovereign, or Family . . . ” *Droit* VI, 2, § ii. Choderlos de Laclos elaborates Rousseau’s reflections on the self-sufficiency of mothers in *De l’éducation des femmes*, II.3.

about for food or shelter; and she can do so by herself alone because she rarely bears more than a single child at a time. As Rousseau sees it, the point at issue between himself and Locke can therefore be reduced to the question: how frequently is the human female likely to be with child in the “pure” state of nature?

A good deal of uncertainty surrounds the principal fact which serves as the basis for Mr. Locke’s entire argument: For in order to know whether, as he claims, in the pure state of Nature the woman is commonly with child again and brings forth too a new birth long before the former is able to shift for himself, would require experiments which Locke has surely not performed, and which no one is in a position to perform. The continual cohabitation of Husband and Wife provides such direct occasion to expose oneself to a new pregnancy that it is rather difficult to believe that fortuitous encounters or the impulsion of temperament alone would have produced as frequent effects in the pure state of Nature as in that of conjugal Society . . . (p. 223).⁴⁷

Locke of course does not speak—here or anywhere else—about the “pure state of nature,” as Rousseau has him do. But what in the present context is most striking about Rousseau’s criticism, is that he does not deny Locke’s “principal fact.” He is not prepared to go beyond saying that he finds it “rather difficult to believe” (p. 223). The issue could conceivably be settled by experiments, that is to say by fact. Once again, however, “no one is in a position to perform” these experiments. The reason why no one is in a position to perform them is not far to seek: to perform them would effectively put an end to the putative pure state of nature by immediately removing the parties from that state, and plunging them into a state of highly developed, structured social relations and culture. Once again Rousseau very clearly indicates why the pure state of nature cannot be known as a fact given as real. The principal question most immediately at issue is whether the child can fend for itself by the time the mother has to attend to the next one. Locke holds that it cannot. Rousseau argues that it may not be unreasonable to assume that in the pure state of nature it could. He assumes—or conjectures—that in that state childhood dependency would be—or was—less long-lasting than it is in our experience, and that nature would soon deal with children who cannot fend for themselves as the law of Sparta dealt with defective children (p. 142). The proposition that in the pure state of nature men and women would be—or were—so self-sufficient that they would not need—and therefore did in fact not—live together in any kind of society, is a frankly conjectural conclusion based on frankly conjectural premises. Rousseau tacitly acknowledges as much in the *Émile*:

47. A full discussion of Rousseau’s criticism of Locke would have to take account, as Meier does (pp. 350–55), of the discrepancies between Mazel’s French translation of the text which Rousseau used and Locke’s original (*Treatises* II, §§ 79, 80); and of the context of Locke’s remarks; but in addition, it would also have to take into account Locke’s remarks in *Treatises* I, § 54, and *Essay* I, 3, §§ 9–12.

children crawl and are weak for such a long time that the mother as well as they themselves would find it difficult to do without the father's attachment and the cares that are due to them.⁴⁸

Men and women would, of course, not from the first live under one roof, united by "the sweetest sentiments known to men," conjugal and parental love (pp. 173f., cp. 153f.). Such a highly structured, sedentary family life certainly is a fact given as real. But reason and tradition alike suggest that the family, like other "moral" aspects of the life of the savage peoples known to us, was preceded by other, simpler ways. However, it does not follow that the only simpler alternative to the stable, settled family, is a roaming life of self-sufficient, solitary individuals without sustained contacts or communication with their kind, and hence without "moral" components of any kind. Rousseau assumes that before the institution of the family, men lived "dispersed among the animals" (p. 142) with few if any incest taboos.⁴⁹ Such a life is certainly more primitive than life in "conjugal society" properly so-called, and hence in at least one sense of "natural," it is more natural. Yet there is no reason to think of it as devoid of all artificial, conventional, or "moral" elements. On the contrary: all the evidence indicates that, with respect to "facts given as real," Rousseau considered the family in this broad sense of the term—and hence artifice or convention—to be coeval with human life, and hence to be, in this sense of the term, "natural."⁵⁰

2.3.2 By contrast, the isolated, self-sufficient, and speechless beings of Part I of the *Discourse* are perhaps most accurately characterized as premises. On the premise of such beings, it is utterly impossible to conceive of how language could have arisen. Rousseau therefore invites the reader simply to accept that, as a matter of fact, "the invention of language" did become necessary.⁵¹ Once that necessity is granted, a new and even greater difficulty arises:

for if Men needed speech in order to learn how to think, they needed even more to know how to think in order to find the art of speech . . . (p. 154).

It would seem to make sense to maintain that the "invention" of language requires thought, for much the same reason that Rousseau's next comment, that

48. *Émile* IV, OC IV, p. 797; Bloom tr. p. 430.

49. Cp. *Essay on the Origin of Languages* in *op. cit.*, p. 255. Before the division of land, "peoples wander and disperse in pastures and forests. Marriage will not be as stable among them as among us, where it is fixed by residence, and where the wife keeps house; they can therefore more readily change wives, have several of them, and sometimes mingle indifferently as beasts do." Montesquieu, *Of the Spirit of Laws*, XVIII, 13. On early incest, *Essay on . . . Languages*, *op. cit.*, p. 272 and note *ad loc.*; also Suarez, *op. cit.* II, xiii, 5.

50. Consider *Discourses, Replies, Languages*, *op. cit.*, pp. 260, 262f., 271f., *Of the Social Contract* I, 2.

51. As did Condillac. He begins his reflections on the origin of language by imagining two infants left abandoned after the Flood: "As long as the children of whom I just spoke, lived separately . . . ;" the next paragraph begins: "Once they lived together . . ." He says nothing about how that change might have come about. Condillac, *Essai*, *op. cit.*, Part II, ch. I, §§ 1, 2.

even the greatest minds bending their best efforts for centuries on end are scarcely likely to succeed in bringing language to the pitch of perfection of which it is capable (pp. 154, 157), makes sense. But upon reflection, the best minds' success in perfecting a language proves to be quite irrelevant to the problem. The best minds do their work within the context of an existing language; they work from "inside" language, so to speak. Rousseau's stated problem, by contrast, is to account for the "invention" of language from "outside" it. That problem, taken strictly, can not be resolved, and Rousseau fully recognizes that it cannot be.

According to the traditional view, the view that suggests itself on the assumption of the "way of ideas" which Rousseau here initially accepts, language is at least at first built up of names for the objects of our ideas: an object is singled out and identified at the same time as it is assigned a name (p. 154).⁵² On this view it is impossible to assign names—or to account for assigning names—to "ideas which have no sensible object and which could therefore not be pointed to by gesture or by voice" (p. 154). Such objects could be publicly singled out and identified only if they already had a name or if they could be described. On either assumption, the institution of language presupposes the existence of language. This circle cannot be broken by assuming that language was instituted by common consent or by contract. True, language is communal. But any account of its beginnings—or, indeed, of the beginnings of any other practice or institution—in terms of contract is, once again, circular. For to establish a language is, in effect, to establish a community of discourse and understanding where, *ex hypothesi*, none existed before. But the institution of such a community presupposes a shared purpose—" . . . this unanimous agreement must have been motivated . . ." (p. 155); it presupposes some already existing community of understanding and discourse. The assumption that all mutual understanding rests on prior agreements leads to an infinite regress of such prior agreements. It is worth noting that the very first time Rousseau discusses contract, he stresses its defects as a description of how a new state of affairs comes into being. The very possibility of speech—or, more precisely, of language—presupposes a community which cannot be derived or deduced from some prior, more primitive condition. Nor can speech be derived or deduced from some hypothetically prior state of utter speechlessness. Its presence or absence can only be taken note of. Rousseau therefore speaks of "the almost demonstrated impossibility that Languages could have arisen and become established by purely human means" (p. 157), that is, invented. The formula suggests the traditional alternative: if not by human, then by divine institution.⁵³ Yet Rousseau recognizes that the successive failures of his efforts to elaborate a satisfactory account of the origin of language no more prove that the "invention" of language required the intervention of God or gods

52. Compare *e.g.*, Locke's *Essay*, III, 2.

53. Plato, *Cratylus* 438c.

(consider pp. 151f.) than the difficulty of explaining the invention of fire or the arts proves the truth of the Prometheus story. Admittedly the analogy is not on all fours: the object in raising the question about the origin of language is not to inquire into the origin of some one among many possible arts or conventions, but to inquire into the condition of the very possibility of art or convention. That is not an historical or empirical inquiry at all. The story of the successive efforts to pursue that inquiry as if it were empirical and of the inevitable failure of all such efforts, can certainly be read as the rhetorical equivalent—the “objective correlative”—of the slow, arduous progress of the mind and of language.⁵⁴ But read as argument, the demonstration that every attempt to assign an absolute beginning to language—or to mutual understanding, or to moral relations—is inevitably circular, serves as a conclusive *reductio ad absurdum* of the premise of wholly isolated, self-sufficient, speechless individuals, and so of the pure state of nature as a possible “fact given as real.”

3. A regressive analysis that takes “the savages known to us” as its point of departure and confines itself to the realm of at least plausible fact, cannot go beyond the hypothesis that from the first men lived in loose-knit, nomadic families, bands or troops, and that

[s]ome inarticulate cries, many gestures, and a few imitative noises must, for a long time, have made up the universal Language, [and] the addition to it, in every Region, of a few articulated and conventional sounds—the institution of which is, as I have already said, none too easy to explain—made for particular languages, crude, imperfect, and approximately like those which various Savage Nations still have today (p. 173).

In the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Rousseau calls them “domestic” in contrast to “popular” languages (pp. 260**, 272).

Beyond this limit, regressive analysis proper must cease, and extrapolation takes its place. Buffon very clearly recognized what Rousseau meant when he spoke about the pure state of nature, and he very clearly articulated the difference between a regressive analysis which remains within the realm of fact alone, and one which, like Rousseau's, seeks to extrapolate to causes or principles:

What we see is not the ideal but the real state of nature: is the savage living in deserts a placid animal; is he a happy human being? For we will not assume, as does a Philosopher, one of the proudest censors of our humanity, Mr. Rousseau, that there is a greater distance between man in pure nature and the savage than between the savage and ourselves; that the ages that elapsed before the invention of art and of speech were far greater than the centuries needed to perfect signs and languages; because it seems to me that if one wants to reason about facts, one has to set aside

54. “Regarding the natural state and the slow progress of the human mind, see the First Part of the *Discourse on Inequality*.” *Émile* IV, OC IV, p. 556n., tr. Bloom, p. 258n.

assumptions and adhere to the rule of invoking them only after everything that Nature places at our disposal has been fully exhausted. Now, we find that by an almost imperceptible regression one proceeds from the most enlightened and polished nations to less industrious peoples, and on to others that are cruder but still subject to Kings and laws; from these crude men to the savages, who are not all alike, but rather exhibit as many differences as do politically ordered peoples; that some form rather numerous nations subject to chiefs; that others, living in a smaller society, are subject only to customs; that, finally, the most solitary and independent among them nevertheless form families and are subject to their fathers. An Empire, a Monarch, a family, a father, these are the two extremes of society; they are also the limits of Nature; if they extended farther, would there not have been found, in traversing all of the globe's solitudes, human animals deprived of speech, deaf to the voice as well as to signs, males and females dispersed, the young abandoned, and so forth? I hold that, short of claiming that the body's constitution was different from what it is today and its maturation much more rapid, it is impossible to maintain that man can ever have existed without forming families, since the children would perish if they were not helped and looked after for several years; whereas newborn animals need their mother only for a few months. This physical necessity alone suffices to prove that the human species could last and multiply only by means of society; that the association of mothers and fathers with children is natural because it is necessary. Now this union cannot fail to produce a mutual and lasting attachment between the parents and the child, and this in turn alone suffices for them to grow accustomed to gestures, signs, sounds among themselves, in a word to all the expressions of sentiment and need; which is also proven by fact, since the most solitary savages, like all other men, have the use of signs and of speech.

Thus the state of pure nature is a known state; it is the Savage living in the desert, but living in a family, knowing his children, known by them, using speech, and making himself understood.⁵⁵

Rousseau fully agrees with Buffon about the facts. He disagrees with him about how to order and to account for them. He disagrees with him about principles.⁵⁶

3.1 The aim of the *Second Discourse* is to ascertain the principles or causes which the facts instantiate or in the light of which they might be understood. In particular, "the pure state of nature" is not of a kind that is or can be as fact, and experiments cannot possibly confirm it as fact. It is original or

55. *The Carnivorous Animals* (1758), in *Œuvres philosophiques, op. cit.*, pp. 373b41–374a55; Buffon returns to these issues in a lengthy comparison between the orang outan and man in which he attends most particularly to the duration of infant dependency among them: *Nomenclature des singes* (1767) *op. cit.*, pp. 389a56–393b8. Choderlos de Laclos returns to the charge, arguing that Buffon has failed to prove that the pure state of nature *could* not be a matter of fact: *De l'éducation des femmes*, ch. 9.

56. For a parallel situation, consider also the disagreement between Rousseau and Buffon regarding the balance of nature: *Discourses, Replies, Languages, op. cit.*, p. 270 n. 1 together with the editorial notes, and the discussion in V. Gourevitch, "'The First Times' in Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*," in *Essays for Richard Kennington, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 1986, 11:123–46, pp. 137f.

primitive in the sense of being a principle or set of principles.⁵⁷ Principles can only be conjectured or thought. That is one reason why, after offering the mating suggestion for the benefit of the crudest observers, Rousseau goes on to say that serious observers will require reports from philosophical travellers, from such men as Buffon among others (p. 220, cp. 200f.),⁵⁸ in other words from the modern Aristotles and Plinys he had called for earlier. When such men say “this animal is a man” and “that is a beast,” they will have to be believed.

The *Discourse* is a study in natural law or, more precisely, in natural right. According to Grotius's influential distinction, natural right can be established in either of two ways: a priori, in terms of the causes or, as he says, “by Arguments drawn from the very Nature of the Thing;” or a posteriori in terms of the effects or, as he says, “by Reasons taken from something external.” In other words, it can be established either by an appeal to principles, or by an appeal to facts.

The former way of reasoning is more subtle or abstracted; the latter more popular. The Proof of the former is by showing the necessary Fitness or Unfitness of any Thing, with a reasonable and sociable Nature. But the Proof by the latter is, when we cannot with absolute Certainty, yet with very great Probability, conclude that to be by the Law of Nature, which is generally believed to be so by all, or at least the most civilized, Nations. For, an universal Effect requires an universal Cause. And there cannot well be any other Cause assigned for this general Opinion, than what is called Common Sense.⁵⁹

Grotius himself proceeds a posteriori, by an appeal to what he here calls the common sense of civilized nations, that is to say by an appeal to effects or to

57. Careful readers will have been alerted to Rousseau's meaning from the first: the famous formula, “[I]et us therefore begin by setting aside all the facts.” (p. 139) echoes the remark, a few paragraphs earlier, that “ . . . after setting aside the dust and sand that surrounds the Edifice ” (p. 134) apparently arbitrary and accidental social relations are found to be intelligible and based on firm foundations. Unfortunately Rousseau's point gets blunted in Meier's translation, which renders the first *écarter* with *entfernen*, but the second with *beiseite lassen*. (Meier, pp. 61, 71).

58. Or like Claude Levi-Strauss, who defines the mission of anthropology and of all the human sciences as the quest for Rousseau's “pure state of nature:”

Natural man is neither prior to society, nor outside it. Our task is to recover his form, which is immanent to the social state, outside of which the human condition is inconceivable; hence to formulate the program of the experiments that ‘would be needed in order to come to know natural men’ and to ascertain ‘by what means these experiments can be performed within society.’

But this model—that is Rousseau's solution—is eternal and universal. *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris, Plon, 1955), ch. 28 *i.f.*, p. 423; cp. ch. 29 *i.f.* p. 339; tr., J. and D. Weightman (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 392, 316; see, further, Hanns H. Ritter, “Claude Levi-Strauss als Leser Rousseaus,” in eds. Wolf Lepenies and Hanns H. Ritter, *Orte des wilden Denkens* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 113–59; as well as Ton Lemaire, *Het Vertoog over de Ongelijkheid van Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Basisboeken Ambo, 1980), pp. 225–33.

59. *Of the Right of War and Peace* (1735 tr.), I, I, § xii. In the phrase “reasonable and sociable nature,” the qualification “sociable” was added by Grotius's translator Barbeyrac.

facts. Hobbes, in an important passage which directly echoes Grotius's text, flatly denies that there is a common sense or practice of civilized nations, and he accordingly rejects Grotius's a posteriori in favor of the a priori way.⁶⁰ Rousseau, like Pufendorf and Locke before him,⁶¹ fully accepts Hobbes's criticism of Grotius's a posteriori or "analytic" procedure, and of its assumption of a civilized common sense regarding right (pp. 159f.). He indicates his difference with Grotius from the very first: the epigraph on the title page of the *Discourse*, "What is natural has to be investigated not in beings that are depraved, but in those that are good according to nature," drawn from Aristotle's discussion of natural slavery, is cited by Grotius in support of his own a posteriori procedure. Rousseau accepts Aristotle's and Grotius's premise, but turns it against the conclusion which they draw from it.⁶² Accordingly he proceeds a priori or "synthetically," by Arguments drawn from the very Nature of the Thing" as Grotius characterizes the a priori way, ". . . derived from the Nature of things . . ." as he himself says he will do immediately after inviting us to set aside all the facts (p. 139), and as he says he did do at the end of Part I of the *Discourse* (p. 168, Meier, p. 166); or ". . . deduced from the Nature of Man . . ." as in the Preface he says that one must proceed in order to establish natural right (p. 131), and as at the end of Part II he says he did proceed (p. 199, Meier p. 271).⁶³ Hobbes's a priori deduction of natural right is, in his

60. " . . . if any man say, that somewhat is done against the Law of Nature, one proves it hence, because it was done against the generall Agreement of all the most wise, and learned Nations; but this declares not who shall be judge of the wisdom and learning of all Nations . . ." Hobbes, *De Cive* II.1; "But howsoever, an argument for [sic] the Practice of men, that have not sifted to the bottom, and with exact reason weighed the causes, and nature of Commonwealths, and suffer daily those miseries, that proceed from the ignorance thereof, is invalid. For though in all places of the world, men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand, it could not thence be infered, that so it ought to be." *Leviathan* c. xx [in fine]; " . . . politics and ethics, that is the science of the just and the unjust, the equitable and the inequitable, can be demonstrated a priori; because we ourselves make the principles, that is the causes of justice, namely laws and covenants, whereby it is known what the just and the equitable and the opposites, the unjust and the inequitable, are." *De Homine* x, 5.

61. Pufendorf, *Droit* II, 3, §§ vii, viii, ix; for a searching discussion see J. B. Schneewind, "Pufendorf's Place in the History of Ethics," *Synthese*, 72 (1987); 123–55, esp. pp. 130–38; " . . . at best an Argument from what has been, to what should of right be, has no great force . . ." Locke, *Treatises of Government*, II, viii, § 103. "Where there is no property, there is no injustice, is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in Euclid: for the idea of property being a right to any thing; and the idea to which the name injustice is given, being the invasion or violation of that right; it is evident, that these ideas being thus established, and these names annexed to them, can as certainly know this proposition to be true, as that a triangle has three angles equal to two right ones." Locke, *Essay of Human Understanding* IV, 3, § 18; cp. §§ 19, 20, and IV, 4, §§ 7, 8, 9.

62. Grotius, *Of the Right of War and Peace* (1735 English tr.), I, 1, § xii; cp. *Of the Social Contract*, 1, 2. Barbeyrac had traced Grotius's a posteriori way to the procedure Aristotle follows in moral inquiry: in Pufendorf, *Droit* II, 3, § vii, note 1. Martin Hübner traces the history of the criticisms of Grotius's a posteriori method: *Essai sur l'histoire du droit naturel* (2 vols., London 1757, 1758), Vol. 2, pp. 55–82.

63. As Kant noted: "Rousseau proceeds synthetically and begins with natural man[,] I proceed analytically and begin with social (*gesittet*) man." *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1912–1923), Vol. XX, p. 14.

view, flawed because Hobbes had failed to attend sufficiently carefully to the difference between the needs and passions of men in the state of nature, and those of men in the civil state (pp. 159f.).⁶⁴ Like all of his predecessors, Hobbes had proceeded *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Rousseau will guard against doing so in his own quest for the principles:

meditating on the first and simplest operations of the human Soul, I believe I perceive in it two principles prior to reason . . . It is from the association and combination which our mind is capable of making between these two Principles, without its being necessary to introduce into it that of sociability, that all the rules of natural right seem to me to flow (pp. 132f.; Meier, p. 56).

In direct contrast to Grotius, who had said that an a priori account of natural right would establish “the necessary Fitness or Unfitness of any Thing, with a reasonable and sociable Nature,” Rousseau asserts that it must establish the fitness or unfitness of things with a nature that is not—or, that, for the reasons already clearly stated by Hobbes, should not be assumed to be—reasonable or sociable.⁶⁵

The pure state of nature to which he for all intents and purposes devotes Part I of the *Discourse* may be looked upon as his statement of his principles: self-sufficiency or natural freedom, and hence moral or political equality, by virtue of the natural balance of needs and powers and of the concert of self-preservation and pity, in short “natural goodness”; and the natural capacity for artifice and convention, and in particular for restoring a balance between needs and powers when it has been upset, in short “perfectibility”. More precisely, Part I of the *Discourse* may be looked upon as Rousseau’s statement of his principles conjectured into existence, bodied forth, and given a local habitation and a name.

These considerations, which could easily be expanded, may suffice to indicate why, and in what sense, Rousseau’s pure state of nature, the state of man without any “moral” relations, artifice, or convention, is necessarily conjectural.

It is but one of the many merits of Meier’s edition of the *Second Discourse* that it stimulates renewed reflection about the premises of that important and absorbing text.

64. So, too, Montesquieu, *Of the Spirit of Laws*, 1, 2.

65. *De Cive*, 1, 1; 1, 2.